

OUT-BRIEF CANDLE

When Sarah Ogilvie's husband, a distinguished economist but a morally shabby individual, died of an overdose of sleeping-powder, suspicion at first fell upon Sarah herself. But also in the house that night were three old school-friends of Ogilvie's, his secretary, and a married couple who served him as butler and cook-mistress: and what of the mysterious, truculent young man whom Sarah had been meeting secretly in Kensington Gardens? Inspector Harris has a number of likely suspects on his hands, but he can solve the problem only by deep research into their past.

OUT BRIEF CANDLE

A Detective Novel by

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To our Mothers

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One

THERE were not many people in Kensington Gardens that afternoon. It was almost winter now, Sarah thought; and she shivered, wrapping her coat more tightly about her. She stopped before the statue of Queen Victoria and stood there looking towards the Round Pond. A few toy sailing-boats dotted the surface of the water. A handful of children and old men waited round the edge for their boats to come back to them.

She walked across the grass towards the Pond. One or two of the benches were occupied. With a start she recognized the man she was looking for on a bench set apart by itself.

He did not get up when she approached. Nodding casually, he smoothed a grubby hand over his thick blond hair. He was wearing brown corduroys, the jacket slightly darker than the baggy trousers, and both well-worn.

"Sorry I'm late," she said, sitting down beside him.

"Come off it. You're not sorry. You're fed up with me."

"What's the matter with you?" Her tone was sympathetic and earnest.

He did not answer immediately. Then he said: "Look here, I need some cash."

"What for?" she asked.

"Oh, go to hell. Don't always ask questions."

A slight smile appeared on Sarah's pale face. "What do you want it for?" she repeated.

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Sullenly the man replied: "For a deal, if you must know."

"I'm not made of money."

"*He* is. You know damn well that you can get it. And you owe it to me."

Sarah sighed. "I suppose so."

The man took her hand, and she did not withdraw it immediately. In a wheedling tone he said: "Look, be a good girl and help me out."

"You know I want to help you. But these 'deals' of yours—well, they never seem to come off."

"You don't know," he muttered. Then, with eyes gleaming, he turned to her and said savagely: "You've bloody well got to give me money. I could make a pack of trouble for you, and for *him*."

"You could make a pack of trouble for yourself. That's all."

"You'd be surprised," he said in a rasping voice. "Take you, for instance. I know what you're after. Stop kidding both of us. You're just like all the other women I know—only they're more honest about it. This big kindness act of yours—all this talk about wanting to help me—that's not what you come here for."

"Shut up," she said lightly. "Aren't you being a bit too conceited?"

"Oh, no, you can't get away with it as easily as that. Do you want me to prove it to you?"

"No."

He put his arm round her and she shivered. "How much do you need?"

His arm dropped and he laughed coarsely. "That's rich. You'll pay me to leave you alone. To keep yourself pure

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for *him*. He's kept himself pure, hasn't he? God, I hate him."

"Then why did you come to me in the first place?"

"For what I could get."

Sarah gave a bitter little laugh. "Well, you certainly came to the right person."

"You're telling me. It's a pity you're not nicer."

"Nicer?"

"Like this." He put his arms round her and hugged her close, then began to kiss her, slowly. Sarah struggled, but she was imprisoned. Half-blinded by tears and anger, she broke free, swung her handbag with all her force and hit him in the face. "You bitch," he said, but he let her go.

She ran from the bench, then ran across the lawn, conscious of people staring after her. She ran past the couple making love, who stopped in the middle of a kiss to watch her; past the gaping children by the Pond; past the mothers, the prim nannies and the idlers whose faces, glimpsed fleetingly, were hostile, harsh and accusing.

At this moment her husband, Henry Ogilvie, the economist, was signing his afternoon's letters preparatory to stopping work for the day. Stokes, his secretary, a tall, thin young man with a stoop, stood behind the high-backed chair looking out of the window at the Kensington streets below. The book-lined study, Stokes's small office, and his own and a spare bedroom, occupied the top floor of the Ogilvies' substantial Victorian house near Gloucester Road.

Ogilvie flipped the leather blotter shut and tossed it to

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one side. "There you are, Stokes. Get these into the post, and then you can knock off." He reached for a cigarette from the large silver box on his desk. "Where are the three country cousins? Gone to see the sights of London?"

"I suppose so," Stokes replied, making for the door.

"Lucky devils. Lucky bachelors." Ogilvie got up from his chair and stretched. He looked his age, forty-three, but his figure was spare and he was still handsome. "Give me a light, will you?"

Stokes returned to the desk, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for his lighter. "Thanks." Once more the secretary made his way towards the door.

"Just a moment, Stokes. I want to have a word with you."

"Yes?"

Ogilvie drew deeply on his cigarette before he continued. "I hear you've been playing the Don Juan."

Stokes stared at his employer levelly and said nothing.

"Well? Have you nothing to say for yourself?" Still the young man was silent. "I see. Somehow I don't think the role suits you. I suggest you give it up."

Stokes's small chin quivered. "I don't think it's your business."

"Think again."

"You don't own me, you know," the secretary mumbled.

"Don't make me lose my temper, Stokes." Nervously the young man began to tidy some papers on a table.

"Stop that woman's work and listen to me! You'll do as I say or you may find yourself out of a job. And you may be sure that you won't get another one as good."

"I suppose you'd see to that."

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"You suppose right. Now get on with those letters and leave me alone."

Slowly Stokes walked to the door. As he opened it, Ogilvie said pleasantly: "By the way, Stokes——"

"Yes?"

"No hard feelings."

With a bleak look the secretary left the room, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Humming to himself, Ogilvie sat down in an armchair by the fire and began to read the newspaper. A few minutes later there was a light knock at the door. "Come in!" he called.

Richard Marinney was Ogilvie's age and of much the same build, but was less good-looking and not as well-dressed. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Henry," he began, "but I saw Stokes go downstairs, so I imagined you'd have finished."

"Oh, I have, I have. Come on in and sit down, my dear Richard. What can I do for you?"

Marinney seated himself in the chair to which Ogilvie waved him. "Thank you. I must say you're very comfortable up here."

"I need to be. When a man's married, he's got to have somewhere of his own, you know," Ogilvie said, not without bitterness. "Have you had a good day? Where are the other two?"

"I don't know. Probably not back yet. We had lunch together, then separated to do some shopping."

"Shopping, eh? I'll bet. Never mind. We won't be young all that much longer."

Marinney's face was tense. "Henry, I——" he began, then broke off, as if in confusion.

"What on earth's the matter? You look a bit under the weather, old man."

"I'm afraid I've got something to tell you. That money you lent me—well, the fact is I can't pay it back just yet."

Ogilvie frowned. "I see. I see."

"I'm frightfully sorry. It's just—just not possible."

"What am I supposed to say? You can hardly expect me to be pleased."

"No. I'm sorry."

"It happens that I'm somewhat short of ready money at the moment. In fact it's quite a blow."

"I'm sorry. I somehow didn't think it would cause you inconvenience."

"Well, it can't be helped. But I hope you're not going to be much longer."

"I can manage at the end of the month."

"That's something, I suppose. But I must say I think it's a bit thick, you know."

Marinney got up from his chair and walked restlessly to the window. It was almost dark now and the street lamps had been lit. After a while he turned round resolutely. "Look, Henry, I've got to say this. I think you're being damned unfair about the whole business. You know my financial situation, and you knew it when you lent me that money. I told you then that I couldn't promise to pay it back by a definite date. I thought the arrangement was tentative."

"It's easy to be tentative with other people's money."

"And it's easy to be punctilious when you're well-to-do."

"I dare say." Ogilvie looked abstracted for a moment,

then he said, in a different tone: "Look here, Richard, I want your advice."

"My advice? I'm no man of the world, Henry. I doubt if there's any subject on which *I* could give *you* advice."

"Well, you know the situation. Anyway I've really made up my mind now. The only trouble is—how to break it to her."

"Sarah?"

"Yes. I'm quite fond of her still. I don't want to hurt her."

"You mean to ask her for a divorce?"

"Yes."

Marinney sat down again, but on the edge of the hard chair. "I've never known you unsure of yourself before."

"I suppose you think I'm being a swine. Well, the guilt's not entirely on my side."

"The guilt?"

"Yes. You know what I'm like. I can't help it. I've always been that way. As for Sarah, she's not above reproach either, I've discovered. So why the hell should I feel badly?"

"Then why do you, if it's all so simple?"

"These things are never simple. Sarah's damn' difficult to deal with: she's far from straightforward. I can never tell what she's thinking."

"Perhaps you don't really know her."

"That's an odd thing to say. Well, if you think you know her better, just tell me this: how should I set about it? I want to get it over and done with, and stop worrying."

"Tell her straight out why you want a divorce. Let her face the facts. Sarah's no fool."

His gaze on the leaping flames of the fire, Ogilvie said reflectively: "I just want to be free."

Half to himself, Marinney murmured: "Poor Sarah."

His words stung the other man. "You don't know, I tell you! We're incompatible. What does a man like you know about marriage? You can't understand what it is to be stuck with a wife you don't get on with."

"I dare say not. I'm sorry, Henry. I imagine you've both had a bad time of it."

"That's just it. That's the line I'll take when I speak to her. We've made each other unhappy, and it's time we put an end to it. Who knows, she may be pleased?" He rubbed his hands together as though he were washing them.

"I wonder," said Marinney, but he knew his words were wasted.

Two

WHEN the clock struck midnight, they left off quarrelling for a moment. The sound of her husband's accusations pounding in her ears through the silence, Sarah turned her back on him. Nervously she fingered the dark red material of the curtains—she was standing by the window—and drew them slightly apart. Opposite there was hardly a light in the terrace of ugly, imposing Victorian houses, and the road was as deep and as mottled by shadow as a gulf. She resisted an impulse to throw open the window and let in the cooling air and the calm night sounds. The atmosphere in the room was oppressive.

Henry came up behind her, and she felt his hand, possessive but not loving, on her shoulder. When she did not turn round he demanded what in the delightful view she was looking at. "Wake up," he said. "It's midnight, and I'm tired, and I want to get everything settled once and for all."

She said nothing, knowing that her silence was her only weapon against him.

Suddenly the hand on her shoulder was shaking her. "I'm sick of you," he said. "You're such a damned secretive woman. You weren't like that when I married you."

Without turning round she replied: "Wasn't I? I don't think I've changed all that much. We've just drifted apart, that's all."

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"Whose fault is that?" he asked in a sharper voice.

"Oh, mine, mine, mine. Everything is my fault."

"Come, come, my dear. I didn't say that."

"No, but I do," she murmured.

"Well, the remedy's in your own hands."

Now she turned, her face calm. "I won't give you a divorce."

"Why not? Why the devil not? You're unhappy, too; you can't pretend you're not. Why go on with it?"

"Because I want to."

"You want to? And what about me? My wishes in the matter don't count, I suppose?"

"They count all right. But I think it's too soon to give up, after only four years."

"But why?" He was almost shouting. "Do you expect things to change overnight? Do you imagine that one morning we'll wake up and find we get on?"

"Yes, in a way that is what I do imagine."

"Rubbish. That's the trouble with women—they're too romantic to see when a thing's finished." The anger in his voice died down and he changed his tone. "Look, my dear, we're just incompatible. It happens to lots of people. They get married, but the truth is that they're not suited to each other—never were, and never will be."

"Just wait another year," she pleaded.

"Have you no pride?" he asked quietly.

For a moment she was silent. Then, "I see," she said in a voice full of pain.

"What is it you want from me? I'll support you, you know, if you divorce me."

"My solicitor would make sure of that," she said dryly.

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"Why won't you let me go? Do you want to punish me? Is that it?"

She stepped back, pressing herself against the window. "When we married, we thought we might make a go of it. I still hope we may. Please, Henry, it's so soon. I feel that we don't even know each other yet. Not properly. I should like us to have another chance."

"So soon, you say," he muttered angrily. "Must a fixed amount of suffering be gone through, like Purgatory, before we get free of a mistake?" She nodded, but he took no notice. "I'm not as young as you, Sarah; I have to hurry up. Life's running away from me."

"By 'life' you mean good times and—women, I suppose."

"That's part of it. You wouldn't understand."

"I could try to, if you'd give me a chance."

"What's the good? Oh, God, I'm tired, utterly tired. Arguing with you is like battering one's head against a stone wall. I see I've made no impression." He moved towards her, threateningly. "You've no right to take this attitude. You admitted a moment ago that you weren't happy either. Well, what are you after? If it's money you're thinking of I can tell you you'll be worse off if you don't divorce me. What do you do with all the money I give you, anyway? You can't be said to dress well."

She was leaning, half-collapsed, against the window-sill. "All right, Henry, you win—as usual. You can have your divorce." Her voice was listless. Before he could speak again, she added, "Please get me a drink."

He stood there, assessing her weakness and surrender; then he smiled, as though scaling a bargain. "A spot of brandy's what you want." Opening a cabinet, he took

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out the decanter and a glass. "Here you are, my dear."

"What about you?" she asked, as he put the decanter back in the cupboard.

"I shall have my milk," he replied. "I want to sleep."

"Oh, you will, I'm sure. Now that everything's settled—so well," she said softly.

He went to the door. "Wait for me, Sarah. I'll be just a minute." He strode out of the room.

As soon as the door had closed behind him Sarah crossed to a bureau that stood near the second of the three windows. Opening a drawer, she quickly took out a packet of letters fastened with a rubber band. Glancing at them cursorily—there were not a great many; they only made a thin packet—she threw them purposefully on the blazing fire and stirred the coal with the poker. "That's that," she said to herself, as she watched the papers curl and burst into flame.

She was leaning against the mantelpiece, gazing into the fire, when Ogilvie entered the room again, carrying a cup of milk, a little of which had spilled into the saucer. "This is what *you* need," he said heartily. "Make you fit again."

"Fit for what?" she asked bitterly.

"You don't let a thing pass, do you?"

"I'm sorry. But you treat me like a child."

He had set down the cup and saucer on a table by the door, and was fumbling with a match to light his pipe. The harsh smell of the tobacco billowed towards her. "Don't be cross with me, Sarah," he said. "Let's stay on good terms. I'm sure you'll find a better husband ~~than me~~, and then you'll thank me."

"Of course," she said formally.

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"I wish you weren't so bitter. I'm not bitter, and it's been just as painful for me."

"Oh, I expect I'll get over it in time."

"It's your pride, isn't it? Pride's foolish. You shouldn't take all this personally."

"How should I take it, then?"

"Blame it all on me. I'm the one at fault. I'm not made for marriage, that's all."

"Then why did you marry me?"

"I made a mistake. Is that so terrible?"

"Yes. For me it is."

Throwing himself on the sofa, he said: "I was asking someone's advice just now. About us."

"You mean you've been discussing us with someone?"

"I wanted advice. An outside opinion."

"I see. I wish you hadn't felt it necessary."

"Why not?"

"Was it Richard?"

After a second's hesitation, he nodded.

"I—I don't know how I'll face him again. Besides—we promised——"

"Oh, yes, we promised. I remember. We promised never to discuss our marriage with outsiders. I remember that just as well as you do. But that's all over and done with. I'm only human. When I've got something on my mind I've got the right to talk it over with anyone I choose."

"How you love an audience!"

Angrily, he half rose from the sofa, then sank down again. "You can say what you like—I won't hold it against you. I know you're upset."

Her voice hardened with anger. "Indulgence is the last

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thing I want from you. You say we can't live together, we can't make a go of our marriage. Very well, then. At least let's have the truth. It's my fault, is it, that we haven't got on? Because I'm cold, because I give so little? Have you ever realized that your life is nothing but a show, a display of your cleverness, your wit, your success? What place is there for me? I don't know you; you've never let me know you as you really are. The merry-go-round never stops turning. I'm sorry for you, Henry. Yes, sorry—to see you always trying so hard to create an impression everywhere."

"Aren't you confusing things?" he asked. "I should say that you're the one who's always putting on an act."

Suddenly she put her hand over her mouth. "I'm sorry to have shouted. Believe me, I'm sorry to have spoken out at all. I'm sorry."

Upstairs, two of the Ogilvies' three guests, James Forbes and Thomas Baker, were closeted together in the former's room. Baker had a puzzled look on his face. "Burying of hatchets all over the place," he said awkwardly. "Glad you came, Jim. Not that I knew he'd invited you and Marinney."

"No," said Forbes. He had a way of mouthing his words as though they tasted sour. "Trust Ogilvie to spring a surprise on all of us. What's he up to, anyway?"

Baker looked embarrassed. "Oh, just getting old. I dare say he felt he wanted to make his peace with the past, the way we all do now. Decent of him really to invite us."

"Decent of us to come."

"Look here, Jim, I don't see any point in taking that

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sort of attitude. Here we are, middle-aged men, not schoolboys any longer. You can't bear a grudge for twenty-five years."

"Haven't you borne one?"

Baker smiled boyishly. His face was smooth and pink, a middle-aged boy's. "Well, I don't any longer."

"Nor do I. All the same, it isn't so easy to forget."

"Why did you come here, then? You needn't have accepted when he wrote."

"For the same reason as you did, I expect. Curiosity. I was curious to see how he'd turned out."

"And what's the verdict?"

"Oh, favourable: he's everything I thought he would be—charming, clever, self-satisfied."

"Good luck to him then." Outside in the passage there was the sound of heavy footsteps, then the opening and shutting of a door. "That's him, isn't it? Just come up."

"Suppose so. Tiring day," said Forbes pointedly.

Baker ignored the hint. "What do you think of her?" he asked.

"Not quite what I expected. A nice enough girl, but hardly striking in any way."

"Well you never know. Still waters . . ."

"So they say. I've never understood women, myself. I'm surprised that *you've* never married, though."

Baker looked at him sharply. "I'd rather not discuss it," he said coldly.

Forbes gave a nervous laugh. "Extraordinary how little you've changed, Tom. How long is it—ten years—since we last met? You really don't look a day older."

"One doesn't change much, you know, when one lives as dull a life as I do."

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"You don't strike me as being dull," said Forbes, with a touch of envy in his voice. "Quite the reverse, in fact."

"Don't I? Well, I dare say I'm different in London. At home, everything seems the same, day after day."

"I don't know why. A chap in your line, after all——"

"I can tell you why," Baker said with a smile. "My parents for one thing."

"How are they?"

"Alive, poor old things. That's about all that can be said for them now. They're tenacious of life, and of me."

"Well, I don't suppose you have to see much of them, in that enormous house."

"An enormous house is all very well," said Baker dryly, "if you've the money to keep it up. We haven't the staff. Most of it is shut up now; we live cheek-by-jowl in one wing. No, I can tell you, Jim, it's quite a relief to get away for a few days."

"I'll be coming to Chester next month on business. May I look you up?"

"Do. Come to lunch. It'll give the Aged Ps something to think about. I only hope I won't be tied up: I've got a busy time ahead. I'm briefing Q.C.s in a couple of important cases at the next sessions."

Downstairs the clock struck the hour as the two friends talked on.

Three hours later Ogilvie's bedroom light was still on—and one other that shone dimly under a door into the third-floor passage. Inside the room Stokes was lying awake staring at the blank wall opposite his bed. He yawned and put up his arm in a protective gesture—the

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bedside lamp had been shining into his eyes, and he reached out to turn it off.

His hand on the switch, he paused and listened. The music was still going on. Ogilvie's gramophone. He would have to go down: he couldn't wait any longer. But glancing at the plump, handsome, not-so-young face of the yellow-haired woman who lay asleep beside him, he switched off the light and lay down again, his hand on her breast.

But the music held his attention, maddeningly. He tried not to listen, but he knew the piece too well—a Corelli Concerto Grosso—bright music, somehow not suited to the hour. The final Andante was drawing to a close, and he knew by now that the gramophone would not be turned off.

The last chords sounded, then the scraping noise at the end of the record; and then the Concerto began again.

Gerald Stokes was now completely awake. He threw himself to the side of the bed, hoping that the rough movement would wake the woman. Her eyelashes fluttered slightly, but she seemed still to be asleep.

When the Concerto finished and, for a fifth time, the Grave, the first movement, began again, Gerald Stokes could stand it no longer. He heaved himself out of bed, his feet found his slippers, and throwing on his dressing-gown he padded to the door.

When he emerged in the passage, his first resolution had left him, and he walked cautiously to the head of the staircase. Carefully now he went down the stairs, holding on to the balustrade and pausing every now and again to listen. Outside Ogilvie's door he waited for a long time, listening; then he knocked. There was no sound other

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than the music. With a decisive movement he opened the door and went into the room.

The bedside lamp was still burning. At first glance Ogilvie appeared to be asleep, the bedclothes rumpled, one arm thrown out. But when Stokes quietly crossed the room to turn off the gramophone beside the bed he knew at once that his employer was dead.

Automatically he bent over the dead man and felt for his heart. His expression as he looked at the distorted face had nothing in it of regret or grief, only of calculation.

Suddenly he straightened and, looking round him quickly, guiltily, ran, hardly making a sound on the thick carpet, from the room, taking care to shut the door behind him—and up the stairs, two at a time, to his room.

The woman was sitting up in bed, calmly plaiting her hair. The sight of her coolness, her prosaic occupation, angered him. "For God's sake, Ada," he blurted out, "Ogilvie's dead."

The women's eyes opened wide, absurdly wide. She let her hands fall, and the plaits swung ridiculously about her neck.

"I tell you he's dead. He must have had a heart-attack."

"And so," said the woman, getting slowly out of bed, "you came to ask me what you should do. That's a clever boy: always needing mother's help." Her eyes were still widened in their dazed, shocked look.

"Come off it, Ada," he said, gritting his teeth. "Look here, you get back to your room. Then I'll call a doctor. Hurry up. You don't want to be found here."

"I'm not going," she said listlessly, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

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"Damn it, you are." Roughly he took up her dressing-gown and put it round her handsome shoulders.

"Just a minute," she said. "Just a minute—darling. I'm just stunned, that's all." As she spoke she got up again and obediently crossed the narrow room to the door. "And now I'm all right. You see I'm all right now. Just give me five minutes, sweetheart, and then call the doctor, the undertaker, whoever you call."

She disappeared into the passage, and he moved forward as though to go after her, but checked himself. With a convulsive shudder he looked at his watch.

Three

INSPECTOR Harris, who was six-foot-four, looked more than life-size in the small ante-room which he and the Divisional Police Surgeon had just entered. From the early-morning street below there came the sound of the doors of the mortuary van slamming, as all that remained of Henry Ogilvie was removed from the house in which he had spent the greater part of his life.

"Well?" Harris said to the little doctor, as he closed the door behind them.

"Well," replied Dr. Mackintosh in his slow voice with its trace of Scots, "I concur with the view of the doctor who was called in during the night. The man's death was due to asphyxiation while in a deep sleep under the influence of a drug heavily administered. However"—here he paused as if to give added weight to the words that were to follow—"I am by no means satisfied that such a death would have been accidental."

"Could it have been an accident?" asked Harris eagerly.

"It could. It has been known. A man who has taken an overdose of a sleeping drug *could* suffocate himself while asleep. But in this case I would be inclined to stake my professional reputation on the unlikeliness of such a thing."

"Your reasons, Doctor?"

"The position of the body, for one thing. I would say

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that the position in which the body was apparently lying was inconsistent with death being due to an accident. And another thing: this man—Ogilvie, did you say his name was?—slept with only one pillow—and a poor, thin thing at that. Now, while someone could have suffocated him deliberately with that pillow, I think it very unlikely that he could have suffocated himself with it. And the eider-down, which might have been the other villain of the piece, had fallen to the floor.”

“I see. Murder. Very interesting, Doctor.”

“I’m not ruling out the possibility of accident, mind——”

“No. But you don’t think much of it, eh?”

“That’s about the size of it.”

“Thank you, Doctor. I’m much obliged to you.”

“If that’ll be all then, I’ll be on my way. You certainly chose a nasty raw morning to get me out before my breakfast.”

“Yes,” the Inspector replied abstractedly. “I’m sorry. You’ll let me have your report?”

“Aye. A bit later. Good-day to you, Inspector.”

As Dr. Mackintosh made his way slowly downstairs, Sergeant Leeds waited impatiently to come up. In spite of his bulk he took the stairs two at a time, a small package wrapped in a handkerchief in his hand.

“Here you are, sir. Somnium. Sleeping-powder taken on occasion by the deceased. ‘One teaspoonful before retiring.’ Well, the poor devil didn’t read the directions this time.”

“Where did you find it?”

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"In the kitchen, sir. Locked cupboard. The deceased kept the key on his chain."

"Any fingerprints?"

"Only his, sir."

"I see. Well, Leeds, it looks as though you can rub out the word 'accident' in your notebook. It seems that someone put a healthy dose of sleeping-powder into his night-cap and did an Othello act on him when he was feeling the effects of it."

"I beg your pardon, sir, what act did you say?"

"Othello, Leeds. A coloured gentleman who smothered his lady-love because he thought her unfaithful."

"Oh, yes, sir. I don't think I recall the case."

"No, Leeds, I don't suppose you do. Well, to return to this sleeping-powder. Who told you that Ogilvie took it?"

"Housekeeper, sir. Name of Barton. Very helpful. Apparently Mr. Ogilvie was a pernickety sort of chap and he used to come down to the kitchen sometimes and get it himself. Put it in a cup of cold milk and then bring it up to the drawing-room to heat."

"To the *drawing-room*? Don't tell me they've got a gas-ring in there?"

"No, sir, electric saucepan. I've sent it and the cup for analysis," he added, with a touch of pride.

"Good. Both found in the drawing-room?"

Sergeant Leeds nodded.

"I see. In fact it looks as though whoever slipped that extra dose of the stuff in the milk was down in the kitchen with him," the Inspector mused.

"Couldn't he have taken the extra dose himself, by mistake? Absent-minded, like?"

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"Very obliging of him, if he did. He made it nice and easy for someone to come along and do him in—if someone *did* come along. The devil of it is we can't rule out the possibility of accident at this stage. But if old Dr. Mack can stake his professional reputation, so can I. But that's by the way. What else did you find out below stairs, Leeds?"

"There's a house full." The portly sergeant consulted his notebook. "Three guests, arrived yesterday, old friends of the deceased. Names of Baker, Forbes and Marinney."

"Yes?"

"The widow, of course. Much younger than the deceased. I get the impression she wasn't on the best of terms with her husband."

"Oh? And where did you get that impression?"

"Kitchen, sir. The housekeeper dropped a hint or two."

"Any other staff?"

"Only the housekeeper and her husband; that's all. There's a cleaning-woman comes in five mornings a week. And there's Ogilvie's secretary, young chap called Stokes, who lives in the house. As I told you before, he discovered the body. That's the lot."

"Nice house," said Harris. "Expensively furnished. I wonder how rich our Mr. Ogilvie was, and who gets what." He crossed to the window and looked out. "I'll tell you something, Leeds. I'm feeling depressed. I've a feeling this case is going to be trouble. God help us—the fuss the damned newspapers make when a body happens to be famous. Which you tell me Mr. Ogilvie was. I can't say I'd ever heard of him."

Leeds shook his head sympathetically. "Neither had I.

OUT BRIEF CANDLE

The butler told me." He added, "I checked in *Who's Who*."

"If it wasn't an accident," Harris mused, "it has to be an inside job. The house wasn't broken into, nothing stolen. Oh, well, Leeds, let's have them in now. Stokes found him, did he? We'll have him first."

Two minutes later Gerald Stokes was accepting a chair, with the air of doing the Inspector a favour. Overnight the secretary's manner had changed: he seemed full of self-confidence now.

Harris, noting the young man's expression, decided to dispense with the preliminaries. "It was you, Mr. Stokes, who found the body?"

"Yes."

"You didn't touch anything?"

"No. I've read my detective stories. I left everything as it was—except for the gramophone, of course."

"The gramophone?"

"Yes. It was that which brought me down in the first place. It was playing the same record over and over."

"At what time was this?"

"Just after four, I believe. I woke up, became aware of the gramophone and thought I'd better go down and turn it off. I mean, it was obvious he'd left it on by mistake."

"So you went in and turned it off. And then what?"

"I saw he was dead."

"Must have been a shock for you," Harris remarked, less out of sympathy than to assess the secretary's reaction.

"I suppose so." Stokes's face gave nothing away.

"Were you on friendly terms with your employer?"

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"Just what do you mean?"

"I mean, you must have been on fairly informal terms to barge into his bedroom at four a.m."

For a moment Stokes looked confused. "As a matter of fact I—I thought at first that the music was coming from the drawing-room. When I got down to the second floor I realized I was wrong."

"But you didn't just go back upstairs," Harris prompted.

"No, I——" Stokes flushed. "I felt annoyed. I thought it was damned inconsiderate of him. It was all right for him, if he could sleep through it. But what about the rest of us?"

"Yes, certainly."

"So I went in quietly, meaning if possible not to wake him."

"And you found that you needn't have troubled to be quiet." Harris looked squarely at the young man. "So you didn't really like your employer?"

"I didn't say that," Stokes protested weakly.

"You implied it. And it's so, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is." Stokes pressed his hands together. "All right, Inspector. I'll save you the trouble of asking your next question. I disliked him for being a tyrant and a bully. He got as much out of people as he could, and took it all for granted."

"You felt that your work wasn't properly appreciated?"

"Yes, I suppose that is what I did feel."

"How about the rest of the household—the others who came into contact with him? How did they feel?"

Stokes's tone was once more cold and wary. "I really couldn't say."

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"Well, we'll leave that point for the moment. Now, to return to what happened this morning. When you saw that Mr. Ogilvie was dead what did you do?"

"I telephoned the doctor. I assumed that he had had a heart-attack or something."

"Did Mr. Ogilvie have a weak heart?"

"Not that I knew of. But people *do* have heart-attacks without any warning, don't they?" Stokes said defensively.

"Oh, yes. So you sent for the doctor. Mr. Ogilvie's own doctor?"

"No. Mr. Ogilvie's doctor is not a local man. It seemed simplest to call the nearest one—Dr. Evans, who lives opposite."

"And Dr. Evans came at once?"

"Yes."

"Were you present during his examination?"

"Yes."

"And what verdict did he pronounce?"

"He said that Mr. Ogilvie had died of suffocation while under the influence of a sleeping drug. He told me to ring for the police."

"Which you did. Where was Mrs. Ogilvie at this time?"

"In bed. I saw no reason to wake her until the doctor was here. He broke the news to her and gave her a sedative."

"The rest of the household—the guests and so on—they were all in their rooms?"

"Yes. When the police arrived I thought I ought to rouse them."

"I see. Now, about Mr. Ogilvie. What was his financial situation, as far as you know?"

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"Really, Inspector," Stokes protested, "I don't see what bearing this has on the fact that Mr. Ogilvie took an overdose and died accidentally——"

"Died accidentally, did you say? Well, Mr. Stokes, I for one am not entirely satisfied that Mr. Ogilvie *did* die accidentally."

Stokes's eyes opened wide. He opened his mouth to speak, but the single word that came out was little more than a whisper. "Murder?"

"Since suicide seems unlikely, that is the only other alternative," Harris replied bleakly. "However, Mr. Stokes, I haven't yet ruled out the possibility of accident, so don't go jumping to any conclusions. And now, to return to my question, perhaps you will be so good as to tell me what you know of Mr. Ogilvie's financial situation?"

"He wasn't rich, but he was very well off."

"And Mrs. Ogilvie? Had she means of her own?"

"Not a penny."

"Mr. Ogilvie was well known?"

On surer ground now, Stokes spoke more firmly. "Very. That's why I stayed with him. The work was interesting. From time to time he even served as unofficial counsellor to the Government."

"I see. You've been with Mr. Ogilvie for how long?"

"Five years."

"You've always lived in the house?"

"Yes. He wanted me on tap at all hours."

"Where is your room?"

"On the top-floor. I have an office there also, and Mr. Ogilvie's study is just across the passage."

Deftly changing the subject, Harris said: "Mr. Stokes, I asked you just now about Mr. Ogilvie's relations with

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the other people in this house. You avoided answering. In the light of what I have just told you, perhaps you would like to reconsider that attitude. You owe it to yourself, you know, since you've admitted that you yourself didn't get on with your late employer."

"I see," Stokes said slowly. "What is it you want to know?"

"Was there anyone else here whom Mr. Ogilvie didn't get on with? His wife, for instance?"

"Look here, Inspector, I'd really rather not say."

"As you wish, Mr. Stokes." There was a silence, during which it was obvious that Stokes was struggling with his conscience. At last his face cleared, his mind made up. "He didn't get on with her," he said in a low voice.

"And how long had they been married?"

"Four years."

"What was—in your opinion, of course—the trouble between them?"

"Women."

"Yes?"

Stokes's mouth curved bitterly. "He just happened to be one of those men who can't leave women alone. It didn't matter who they were, or where he found them. I once saw him picking up a girl in the street, in front of a restaurant. That was Ogilvie. Not that Sarah—Mrs. Ogilvie—knew all this."

"Oh. Then how did it make trouble?"

"He was always on edge. I suppose he was bored with her, and so they quarrelled. They were at it again last night, I believe."

"Violent quarrels?"

"Not on her side. She always tried to pacify him. It

usually worked. So they managed to keep their marriage going."

"What would you say, Mr. Stokes, that Mrs. Ogilvie felt towards her husband?"

"I'm sorry, Inspector, I just don't know. She's a very reserved woman: I don't think she ever shows her feelings—certainly not to me."

"How about the staff—the housekeeper and her husband? How did Mr. Ogilvie treat them?"

Stokes leant back in his chair. His voice, when he spoke, was just a shade too controlled, too even. "Not badly. He didn't interfere with them. He left them to run the place themselves."

"How long have they been here?"

"Twelve years."

"Twelve years? Before he was married, in fact?"

"That's right."

Harris rose from his chair and made as if to open the door. "Well, thank you, Mr. Stokes. You've been very helpful. Is there anything else you can think of that might be of interest to us?"

"I don't think so."

"Did Mr. Ogilvie have any enemies?"

"Lord, no. Not personal ones. Professional ones, I suppose, but that's another matter."

"Certainly. By the way, Mr. Stokes, would you tell me how you spent last evening?"

"After dinner I went for a walk, came back at half past ten, and went to bed. Not alone"—Stokes gave a coy laugh—"with a book. I turned out my light around eleven and fell asleep almost straight away. I heard nothing until the music woke me up, as I've told you already."

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"You'll be looking for similar work to what you did here?"

"Not immediately. Mrs. Ogilvie has asked me to stay on for a few weeks—there's a good deal to put in order."

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Stokes." Harris opened the door and ushered the secretary out. "Sergeant Leeds, will you ask Mrs. Ogilvie to come in now? No, wait. I think I'll see her in the drawing-room."

Four

HARRIS was somehow surprised to find that Sarah Ogilvie was not more than averagely good-looking. Quiet, pale, simply dressed, she was not at all the type of woman he would have expected a man like Ogilvie to have married.

"I'd like to offer you my sympathy, Mrs. Ogilvie. I'll try to keep this unpleasant interview as short as possible."

"Thank you. Do sit down." She sat, but he remained standing by the fireplace. Sergeant Leeds had placed himself unobtrusively on an upright chair in a corner.

"Has it occurred to you, Mrs. Ogilvie," Harris gently began, "that your husband's death might have been the result of foul play—of murder?"

"Murder? But I thought the doctor said——"

"Yes, I know what the doctor said. However, I'm afraid that *we* aren't entirely satisfied that Mr. Ogilvie died accidentally. There will have to be an investigation, you understand; I shall have to ask everyone in this house a good many questions. I hope I can count on your co-operation."

Hunched in her chair, Sarah looked small and defenceless, her expression one of complete bewilderment. "But who?" she murmured, as though speaking to herself. "Who could have murdered him?"

Briskly, Harris tried to arouse her. "If it *was* murder it

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was an inside job. There's no sign of anyone having broken in—nothing stolen. So I should like you first, please, to tell me something of the people who were in this house last night. Will you do that for me, Mrs. Ogilvie?"

She drew a shaky breath. "Very well, Inspector. The people in the house were my—my husband and myself, Mr. Stokes, my husband's secretary, and three old school-friends of my husband's. Of the three, I met Mr. Forbes and Mr. Baker for the first time yesterday, and I know Mr. Marinney only very slightly. Then there were the servants, the Bartons. They have a child."

"I see. As to these three friends, did your husband see much of them in the normal course of events?"

"No. He saw Richard Marinney occasionally, but as far as I know he hadn't seen the other two since their school-days together. They were all at Wellingbury."

"More than twenty-five years ago, I suppose? Why, do you know, did he invite them to stay after all this time?"

"I don't know. He just told me he wanted to have a reunion."

"And said nothing else about them?"

"Nothing else."

"Now what about the secretary, Mr. Stokes? Was your husband quite satisfied with his work?"

Her pause was only momentary. "Yes, certainly."

"But with his work only?"

"What makes you think that, Inspector?" If she was confused, her face did not show it.

"Mr. Stokes himself admitted something of the kind."

"I see."

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"Why didn't they get on, Mrs. Ogilvie?"

In a low voice she said: "They were both highly-strung. Working in close quarters like that, they were bound to have differences."

"That was all?"

"So far as I know." Her tone was sharp.

"Now about last night. Will you be kind enough to tell me in your own words what happened from, say, dinner onwards?"

Her gaze directed not at Harris, but towards the windows, Sarah drew a deep breath and began in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice. "We had dinner as usual at eight. After dinner—that is, at about nine—Mr. Stokes and I left the table. I came up here and sat reading. I believe Gerald went out for a walk—he often does in the evening. My husband and his friends remained in the dining-room. They stayed down there rather a long time. I think they came up somewhere about ten."

"All together?"

"Yes, I think so. No, wait, I have an idea that Mr. Marinney came in first. He was followed a few minutes later by the others. We sat and talked for an hour or so, and then our guests went to bed. My husband and I were left here alone. I'm not quite sure what time I went up—it was some time after midnight."

"Leaving your husband here?"

"Yes."

"You and your husband do not share a bedroom, Mrs. Ogilvie?"

A faint flush spread over Sarah's pale face. "No. We never have. My husband often works late and he does not like to disturb me."

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"What time did your husband come up to bed?"

"I'm afraid I don't know. I was exhausted, and must have fallen asleep immediately."

"You didn't hear his gramophone?"

"No. I suppose I'm used to it. He often puts on a record while he is undressing."

"Your rooms are adjoining?"

"Not quite. Our bathroom is between them."

"Mr. Stokes sleeps where?"

"On the top floor."

"I see," mused Harris. "It seems odd that he should have been woken by the gramophone and that you should not have heard it."

"As I have already told you, Inspector," Sarah said slowly, "I was exhausted. In those circumstances I sleep deeply."

"It is not your habit to take a sleeping-draught?"

"No."

"But your husband did?"

"On occasion, yes."

"Prescribed for him by his doctor?"

"Yes."

"Who is your husband's doctor, Mrs. Ogilvie?"

"Sir Clement Fraser. In Wimpole Street."

"A very distinguished physician, I'm told. When did he prescribe this sleeping-draught for your husband?"

"About six months ago, I think. My husband had been overworking and he was sleeping very badly. For a time he took it every night. Lately I believe he took it only occasionally."

"He took some last night?"

Sarah looked up in surprise. "Surely you know——?"

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"I only know that your husband was under the influence of a drug. I don't know that he *took* it."

"I—I think so. He went downstairs while I was in here to fetch himself a cup of milk. That was the way he took his somnium—in milk."

"Did he drink it immediately?"

"No. He put it down somewhere—I'm afraid I can't remember where."

"It was not hot milk, then?"

"Yes. Or rather, no. He drank it hot, but he hadn't yet heated it. He had a saucepan—an electric saucepan that he bought on the Continent, in that cupboard. He liked to read here by the fire and heat his milk when he felt ready for it. When he began to feel drowsy he went up to bed."

"The somnium was kept in the kitchen?"

"Yes, in a small cupboard, with some other drugs."

"It seems odd that your husband did not keep it in his own room."

"The doctor had warned him against that. Apparently one is liable to take a second, or even third, dose without realizing. So Henry kept it in the kitchen, locked up."

"And had the key on his chain?"

"Yes. You found it?"

"We found it. Since Mr. Ogilvie kept the key himself, what was to prevent him going down to the kitchen again for a second dose?"

"That would be most unlikely. The effort of getting up and leaving the room would be sufficient to make one realize that one had already taken a dose."

"I see. Would you say, Mrs. Ogilvie, that your husband was a precise man? Careful?"

"Certainly. He was inclined to be—well, rather fussy."

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"Did you ever prepare his night-cap for him? Or the butler?"

"Never. It was something he preferred to do for himself. I don't think he trusted us." Immediately she had spoken the knowledge of what she had said seemed to strike her, and a look of consternation came over her face. "I mean, he was a bit particular about how things were done for him."

"I understand," Harris said kindly. "Now to return to last night. I'm sorry, Mrs. Ogilvie, to have to bring up something that must be rather painful to you. I'm afraid that you and your husband were overheard—quarrelling."

She clasped her hands together tightly in her lap. "Yes, we quarrelled. It was nothing important—nothing that could possibly interest you, Inspector. I can't tell you more."

"Did you quarrel frequently, Mrs. Ogilvie?"

"No more than most married people. I'd be grateful if you'd drop this, Inspector."

"Very well. If you wish it. But if I may advise you——"

"I know. It is wiser to conceal nothing. But I assure you there is nothing to conceal. Nothing of importance."

Harris shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Mrs. Ogilvie."

Sarah was beginning to show signs of strain. She was not in any way visibly agitated, but there was something about her—a certain drooping of her figure, a weariness in her voice. Her eyes were red-rimmed, as though she had been weeping for hours.

"I'm afraid there are a few more questions I must put to you," Harris went on. "You say you went up to bed some time after midnight. How do you know that?"

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"The clock struck midnight while we were in here."
She nodded towards the mantelpiece.

"When did your husband go down to the kitchen?"

"Shortly before I went to bed."

"You went straight upstairs?"

"Yes."

"You didn't meet anyone on the way?"

"No."

"You were not aware of anyone entering the drawing-room after you had left it?"

"No."

"Then you can't tell me if your husband was alone with anyone else last night?"

She hesitated for a moment. Then she said, "Yes. When he came up from the kitchen with the milk he did mention that he had been talking to someone there."

"Just someone?"

"I—I think it might have been Mr. Marinney."

"What exactly did your husband say?"

"I'm afraid I can't remember. He just said he'd had a word with someone downstairs. I assumed somehow that he meant Mr. Marinney."

"Mr. Marinney had stayed in the house before?"

"Yes. Once. About a year ago."

"He would have known his way to the kitchen?"

"I suppose so."

"It was midnight when your husband went down to the kitchen. Didn't it strike you as odd that Mr. Marinney should be there at that hour, or indeed at any hour?"

"I suppose I might have been surprised ordinarily. Last night I was too tired to think about it."

"Where is Mr. Marinney's room?"

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"On the third floor."

"And the other guests? Where are they? Perhaps you can give me an idea of the house?"

"Mr. Baker and Mr. Forbes are on the second. We have four bedrooms and two bathrooms on that floor. Mr. Stokes has a room on the third, with a spare bedroom next door—that's Mr. Marinney's. There is a lavatory up there, but no bathroom. My husband's study is there, and Mr. Stokes's office. The Bartons are in the basement. Will there be much more, Inspector? I'm really very tired." She could tell that, in spite of the kindness of his manner, he was hostile to her, and the effort of speaking calmly and civilly was beginning to tell.

"I'm sorry. No, I don't think there will be much more—for the present. If I may just revert for a moment to the somnium: who in the house would have known that your husband took it, and where it was kept?"

"Well, I did, of course," she said, almost defiantly. "And the Bartons. Gerald, perhaps. I don't really see how the others can have known. I doubt if Mr. Baker or Mr. Forbes would have known where the kitchen was, even. They both arrived only yesterday."

"I see. Well, thank you, Mrs. Ogilvie, that will be all. I'm sorry to have kept you." She rose, and as he opened the door for her, he added, "By the way, you weren't planning to go anywhere just at present, were you? I think I should like you to stay in the house for the time being. In any case you'll be wanted for the inquest, of course."

"No, Inspector, I wasn't planning to go away."

"That's fine, then. Good morning, Mrs. Ogilvie."

Shutting the door behind her, Harris walked decisively back to the fireplace. Taking the poker, he carefully

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raked the embers, then gathered a little pile of charred paper in his hand. Looking it over, he took out a large handkerchief and placed the paper in it. "Hm," he said, "someone's been burning their correspondence. Get this analysed, will you, Leeds?"

Five

“YES, sir?” said Barton, as though it were for some routine service that he was wanted. He shut the door carefully behind him and stood with his straight back almost touching it.

“You’re the butler?” Harris asked.

“Yes, sir—butler and general manservant.”

“How long have you been in Mr. Ogilvie’s employment?”

“Just on twelve years, sir.” The little man came forward. Facing the Inspector, and with his absurdly straight back, by contrast he appeared even smaller than he was in reality.

“I expect you knew him very well,” Harris said sympathetically, and waited for a rush of confidences. But Barton only answered quietly:

“He wasn’t a man whom anyone knew well. Not even——” He broke off, as though he had thought better of what he was about to say.

“Not even his wife?” Harris swiftly asked.

Barton let out his breath in a long sigh, and nodded reluctantly.

Inspector Harris grinned. “Don’t worry. You haven’t given anything away. I know all about things in *that* department.”

“Who’s told you, sir?”

Harris continued to smile. “Mrs. Ogilvie herself. That

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clock"—abruptly he changed the subject—"did you hear it strike midnight last night?"

"No, sir. Our rooms are in the basement. We can't hear the clock in this room down there."

"Is the kitchen in the basement as well?"

"That's right. Next to our bedroom. The kitchen's at the back, then our room and the boy's little room across the passage, and our sitting-room at the front. The basement flat, like."

"I see. That's not altogether convenient for you, I suppose. If Mrs. Ogilvie or someone else happened to come downstairs to the kitchen in the night it would probably wake you."

Barton's eyes dropped momentarily. "It—not always," he said.

"But sometimes," Harris persisted.

"Yes."

"You and Mrs. Barton share a bedroom, I take it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you go to bed last night?"

"About eleven. We'd been watching the TV. I think it must have been about eleven. The boy went off before nine."

"And were you asleep by midnight?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"But a noise in the kitchen woke you shortly afterwards."

Barton's face assumed a blank expression. "Why, no," he said slowly, inquiringly.

Harris slapped the table at which he was sitting with one hand, in a gesture of disgust. "Look here," he said mildly, "you needn't be afraid of telling me anything. I happen to

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know that the Ogilvies came down to the kitchen together just after midnight. It has no bearing on Mr. Ogilvie's death: just a matter of establishing the facts. I want to find out if you heard them. Please think: did you wake at all, even for a moment?"

There was a long silence, while Barton looked away again, blinking. At last he answered: "Yes. I remember now. I did wake for a minute or two. It was just gone twelve. I heard it—a clatter at the sink, as I thought."

"Did you hear what they were saying?"

"I wasn't—I wasn't sure."

Harris's tone changed to a harder, more demanding one. He gripped the thin edge of the table tightly with both hands and leaned forward towards the butler. "You admit that you heard the voices. Then you must have heard something at least of what they said."

Barton rubbed his hands together nervously. "I—yes, I heard one or two words."

"*What did you hear?*"

Again the butler hesitated, and now his hands eased his collar. "I heard her—Mrs. Ogilvie—tell him to get away and leave her. That's all."

The room was filled with silence. The little man stared, looked awed and frightened. Then he ventured to whisper, wretchedly, "I may have been mistaken. I may have dreamt it."

Harris took no notice, but only asked: "Your wife—she didn't wake?"

"No, sir."

"Did you and your wife often talk about how things were between them?"

Again, like a veil, reserve fell across Barton's face. Stiffly

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he answered: "One doesn't, you know, sir, discuss one's employers."

Now Harris's tone became flattering. "I know all about that, Barton. You're one of the old school, aren't you? You and I understand each other. You never discussed your employers, fair enough, but what did you *think* of the situation? Which of them did you think was more to blame?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir."

"You preferred Mr. Ogilvie to Mrs. Ogilvie?"

"No," the butler admitted. "I like her better."

"She's easier to work for? Less demanding?"

"That's it."

"You felt she was in the right?"

"Well, sir, I thought it was a bit hard on her. True, she used to spend a lot of money. But he had the money, after all; he could spare it."

"When he married you didn't resent it—having a mistress over you, after all those years?"

Barton hesitated. Then, "We didn't mind," he said.

"She runs the house well?"

"She runs nothing," said Barton proudly. "My Ada does it all."

"I see. Thank you, Barton, for being so helpful. That'll be all. Leeds, will you ask Mrs. Barton to come up now?"

Taking his cue, the Sergeant was the first to go out of the room, Barton following more slowly.

Ada Barton came into the room, followed closely by the Sergeant, and, without being asked to, sat down facing the Inspector. Her expression was grim. She was wearing

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a plain brown dress, with a high rounded neck and long sleeves, its demureness setting off the splendour of her full figure and bright blond hair.

"Now, Mrs. Barton," Harris began, "I'm afraid I shall have to trouble you for the answers to some questions." Almost imperceptibly she nodded her head.

"Your husband," he continued, in a voice that had become a shade more casual, "has told me how you both spent the latter part of last evening. I shan't trouble you with more questions of that kind. What I really hoped to get from you, as a woman, is a clearer picture of last night's events. I'm sure you can help me."

"Last night," she repeated musingly, in a sharp little voice. "It was much the same as usual."

"Had Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvie quarrelled?"

"I suppose so." She smiled tolerantly. "They usually did."

"About money?"

"Yes."

"And other things?"

"I wouldn't know, Inspector."

"Have you any idea, Mrs. Barton, how Mrs. Ogilvie spends her money?"

"Spends his money," she corrected. "I don't know. But I can tell you one thing: it isn't on herself. She hardly ever buys any clothes. And she doesn't drink. I'd know if she did—I'm acquainted with the symptoms," she concluded dryly, adding, "It's as much a mystery to me as it is to you, or was to Mr. Ogilvie, what she did with it all."

"You know that Mr. Ogilvie was also in the dark about his wife's expenditure? He told you?"

She stared at him. "Told me? Why should he have told

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me? No, they quarrelled about money often enough. We couldn't help hearing. There was only one other thing."

"Yes?"

She shook her head slowly. "I think I'd better keep it to myself."

"Look here, Mrs. Barton, we can't have any of that. Now please finish what you meant to say."

"I'm afraid it might give you the wrong idea."

"That's for us to sort out. You can get into serious trouble, you know, for withholding information."

"Well," she said, sighing, "it's nothing important. Only that she—Mrs. Ogilvie—had a young man."

"A lover, you mean?"

"I don't know. It was all very queer. Quite by chance one day I saw her with him in the Gardens. I was fetching my little boy home from school. He goes to school in Bayswater. I saw her sitting on a bench with this man. A good bit younger than her he looked."

"What led you to believe there was anything between them?"

"I can't really say. It was just the way they sat together looking at each other. Then one day he came round to the house. She was scared, I can tell you. She let him in herself, *and* she sent him away in five minutes. That must have been a month ago. I haven't seen him since. But she has, I should think. She's been acting rather strange. I wonder if—nothing. No, it's nothing."

"You think Mr. Ogilvie might have found out about this young man?"

"I don't know."

"No one saw fit to tell him?"

"Not me. Why should I interfere?"

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"You seem to have your wits about you, Mrs. Barton. Now what about the husband? Was there anything doing on that side?"

"You mean, did Mr. Ogilvie have a girl-friend?"

"That's exactly what I do mean. Was there anyone he saw regularly?"

"Why, I couldn't say, Inspector. But I don't think so. No, he wasn't that sort of gentleman. Not in the least, I can tell you."

"I see. Just a wronged husband."

"That's about it."

"Well now, Mrs. Barton, to return to my original question. What about last evening? Did you notice anything unusual?"

She appeared to think, her forefinger tapping her forehead. "Now, let me see. We had company for dinner, of course. The gentlemen stayed in the dining-room very late—made me miss my programme. Mrs. O. went up after dinner; then she came down to the kitchen. Wanted to discuss today's meals with me. She seemed a bit tense, I must say, but perhaps it was nothing."

"Can you be a bit more precise?"

"Afraid not, Inspector. She just seemed on edge. Kept looking round the kitchen."

"That was all?"

"Yes, Inspector."

"You've been twelve years with Mr. Ogilvie. Would you have described him as a difficult man?"

"Oh, no. Not before his marriage, at any rate."

"But his marriage made him difficult?"

"Well, it changed him, shall we say?" she said winningly.

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"I see. What did you think of his marrying so late?"

She leant forward, deliberately. "I thought it was crazy," she said.

"Why do you dislike Mrs. Ogilvie?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Does it seem so strange? Everything was simple and pleasant before she came here. Afterwards it was all different."

"How different?"

"Oh, quarrels and a nasty kind of atmosphere."

"It disrupted the household?"

She nodded.

"Well, to return to last night. You saw Mrs. Ogilvie in the kitchen, and then——"

"After the gentlemen came up I finished clearing. My husband helped me. Howard, my boy, was in bed. We watched the telly for half an hour, then I had a bath and we went to bed. Before half past eleven, it was."

Harris gazed out of the window for a moment, then he said, in a vague, disinterested voice: "Your husband tells me you were both awakened by a clatter in the kitchen about midnight."

Her eyes widened, in unmistakable apprehension. "Why—yes, we were."

"But you told each other it was only Mr. Ogilvie and went back to sleep again almost immediately."

She breathed deeply. "Why—yes, that's right."

"Mr. Ogilvie was in the habit of coming downstairs, I understand, to fetch himself a cup of milk?"

"Yes, he generally did."

"Did Mrs. Ogilvie ever join him in the kitchen?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure she did. I've sometimes heard them."

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Harris rose to open the door. "Thank you, Mrs. Barton," he said politely. "That will be all." As she went out she gave him a winning smile.

"A poisonous piece," said Harris, as he shut the door behind her.

"She and Stokes are a pair," the Sergeant agreed.

Harris looked surprised. "That could be. There's a lot in this case that needs thinking over."

"I must say, she's a real Marilyn."

"Exactly. If it was a woman that caused the bad feeling between Ogilvie and Stokes, it might have been her. Did you notice, Leeds, how she tried to make out that her boss was one of nature's gentlemen? But according to Stokes he couldn't keep his hands off a pretty woman. If he *was* a one for the ladies he'd hardly let *her* slip by. No, it doesn't ring true, when she says he never made a pass, a woman like her."

"I thought she overdid it a bit, sir."

"And then there's her story about Mrs. Ogilvie. She didn't need much encouragement to spill that. Like Stokes she was bursting to tell. She's got it in for Mrs. Ogilvie, all right." He sighed. "It's all very complicated: nothing to go on, not even a certainty that it *was* murder. Better put a man on to following Mrs. Ogilvie. Who knows, she may take him for a walk in the Gardens."

Ada went slowly downstairs to the kitchen. There her husband was sitting, his elbows resting on the table and his head in his hands.

"What do you think you're doing here?" she asked him sharply.

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Almost painfully he raised his head. "What have you told them?"

"Nothing to make *you* . . . id," she replied, moving with a great show of nonchalance to the cupboard, which she opened, to take out a tin of beans.

"How much of the truth did you let out?"

She smiled with bitterness. "Only so much as has nothing to do with you and me."

"They asked me all about the master and mistress. I'm afraid she's in trouble, poor thing."

"Poor thing, my foot. No more than she deserves. I hope you let them know about the quarrels."

Again he buried his head in his hands. "I said too much. And you?"

"For all your being so discreet," she said mockingly, "there was little enough I could tell them after they'd been talking to you."

"Don't you realize," he mumbled into his hands, "that now they've got on to the fact that there was trouble in the house, they'll try to find everything out?"

"What a fool you are! You heard what they said: this may be murder. If a murder's been committed they can't imagine this house was a paradise of peace." She banged the tin of beans on the table and sat down opposite her husband, leaning across to him. "And what about me? It's easy for you to play a part; you've played one all these years. Haven't you, sweetie? Oh, get out and leave me alone. I'm fed to the back teeth with you. You've a nerve sitting there as though you'd lost your best pal. I'm the only one in this house who's sorry he's dead. Oh my God, has it come to this?" She stared fixedly at the ceiling, but not a tear came to her eyes. "I'm not giving them lunch;

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she's going out anyway. You can tell the others to fend for themselves. They can't expect it of me. I won't wait on anyone."

Suddenly she seized Barton's hand. "I'll tell you something. I'm not really upset. Not really. I just don't feel anything." She let his hand go and leant back, with a burst of hysterical laughter. After it had passed, she sat, visibly shaken, and added, "I'm only depressed. That's all. I'm not really upset."

Barton got up more stiffly than ever and came round the table to her. Timidly, tentatively, he put a hand on her shoulder. Getting no response, he withdrew it, picked up the tin and took a saucepan from a peg. "You sit there," he said gently. "I'll get the lunch."

"You can get your own. I can't eat."

"It's for your own sake I want you to get a grip on yourself. You're not upset, you say. Well, look at it this way: we can start again. After all, we're husband and wife."

But she was not listening. He stopped and looked towards the door, at which she was staring. Someone had opened it quietly and was holding it ajar.

Then it opened wider and a boy of about eleven slipped round it, defiantly, into the room.

"Little devil!" exclaimed Ada.

"What are you doing here?" asked Barton. "Who sent you home from school?"

"No one sent me," the boy replied surlily. "I never went this morning."

"Why not?" his mother demanded.

"I didn't want to." He stood there, out-staring her in defiance.

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"Since when are you your own boss?" she asked angrily, but the beginning of a smile had appeared on her face.

"You'll get nowhere if you don't go to school," Barton said.

"That's true enough," Ada said contemptuously. "You will grow up to be like him"—jerking her thumb at her husband—"a nobody."

The boy came round to where his mother sat. "I stayed because I thought you'd need me, Mum." His voice was serious now.

"To add to the confusion," grumbled Barton.

"You be quiet," said the boy. "I know what's happened. I know more than you, you old bastard."

"Now, now, Howard, I've told you not to use that word," his mother said, indulgently. "What do you know?"

"I know why old Ogilvie is dead."

"Don't speak of him like that, you wicked boy!"

"Why not, now he's dead?"

"He can't punish the child where he is," Barton said with irony.

"Well, come on, tell us then, why is he dead?" she asked the boy.

He smiled secretly, moved closer to her, and pointed at his father. "Because *he* wanted him to die."

"You little wretch!" cried Barton, advancing on his son, who stood his ground. Ada intervened by coming between them, and the boy turned on her.

"Shall I tell the policemen you weren't in your room last night?" he said.

She fell back a step. "It doesn't matter in the least where

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I was. Anyway, what put such a stupid idea into your head?"

"I know about these things. It's your alibi."

She shook her head indifferently. "It's not in the least important, ducks."

"Then shall I go and tell that detective in the hall? Shall I, Mum?"

Barton sighed. He was standing less erect. "That's enough out of you, my boy. You can stay at home."

"Whenever I like?" asked the boy triumphantly.

Wearily Barton replied, "Whenever you like."

A patch of sun burst suddenly through the dismal morning, and the brightness lay around them mockingly, inappropriately, transfixing the three for a moment in unlovely, unhappy attitudes.

Six

BAKER had little light to throw on the case. He had arrived, soon after Forbes, some time around eleven yesterday morning. Stokes had taken them both upstairs to see Ogilvie: after a brief talk with their host—he was busy—they had gone out with Marinney, lunched together and then separated. Baker had done some shopping, then gone to the cinema and afterwards had a drink in a pub: he had not returned to the house until just before dinner. During and after dinner the conversation had been general, and he had not been alone with Ogilvie.

No, he had no idea why Ogilvie had invited them. It seemed natural enough, after all these years, to think of having a reunion. Yes, they had been close friends at school, but had hardly met since.

“We all live in different places,” said Baker. “That’s partly the reason.”

“Partly?” said Harris. “Was there some other reason?”

Baker smiled boyishly. “Only that people who are friends at school so often have nothing in common ten or twenty years later.”

“And that was the case with you and Mr. Ogilvie?”

“I’m afraid I couldn’t answer that. I saw him so little yesterday.”

“How about the others—Mr. Forbes and Mr. Marinney? How were they yesterday?”

“If you mean, was there anything about them that

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struck me as odd, the answer is, no. I spent quite a long time alone with Forbes. He told me how delighted he was to see Ogilvie again. I think we all felt the same."

"You say you were alone with Mr. Forbes. When was that?"

"Last night. After we had come up to bed. I went along to his room after my bath, a little before twelve. We talked until well after one."

"I see. You went to bed sometime after one, then? Did you hear Mr. Ogilvie's gramophone?"

"I certainly did. But I can sleep through anything." Baker gave his boyish laugh. "I was in the Army."

"Neither you nor Mr. Forbes left Mr. Forbes's room between, say, twelve and one?"

"No."

"Did you hear Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvie coming up to bed?"

"We heard footsteps once or twice: I couldn't say who they belonged to, or exactly when."

"Thank you, Mr. Baker, you've been very helpful," Harris said mechanically. His voice was more than a little gloomy.

Forbes's interrogation went much the same way, except that he was a little nervous, a little too anxious to please. He had arrived on the 10.10 at Paddington, travelled by underground, and reached the house well before eleven. Stokes had given him a cup of coffee in the breakfast-room downstairs, and then shown him to his room. There he had unpacked. At about eleven-thirty Stokes and Baker had collected him and they had gone upstairs to see

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Ogilvie. *He* had spent his afternoon seeing his solicitor and having tea at his Club, where he read the papers. Returning to the house at seven, he had taken a bath and changed before dinner. He had not seen Ogilvie alone.

Yes, Baker had come to his room and stayed talking for over an hour.

"Did either of you leave the room during that time, Mr. Forbes?"

A slight look of consternation appeared on Forbes's already anxious face. For a moment he hesitated. Then, "No, Inspector," he said firmly, "I don't believe either of us did." In the short silence that followed, a little colour flowed into his pale cheeks.

Yes, he had heard the gramophone. As a matter of fact, it had kept him awake: he was a very light sleeper. But he did not feel it was his business: after all, one was only a guest in the house. Eventually he had dozed off.

"Jumpy, isn't he?" was Leeds's laconic comment when Forbes had left the room.

"Yes," mused Harris. "You'd almost think he had something to hide. But if those two were together from before twelve until after one it makes things a bit simpler: Ogilvie took that sleeping-draught between twelve-thirty and one, and apparently he was in the kitchen after twelve."

On the way upstairs after being interviewed by the Inspector, Forbes met Baker coming out of the bathroom.

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"I say, old chap," he said nervously, "how soon do you think we can decently move out?"

"Move out?" Baker looked surprised.

"Surely you don't mean to stay on here now?"

Baker shrugged. "I hadn't thought about it. I'd made my plans to come up for a week."

Forbes cleared his throat. "I don't want to get involved. Look here, Tom, you know where I stand. I'm sorry for what's happened to Ogilvie, but I can't pretend to be grieved. And since that's the case, I want to keep clear of it all."

"But you are involved already, don't you see? It's too late to do anything about it. I gather the police want us all to stay on here. In any case I suppose we may be needed at the inquest. If you do something different from everyone else, like moving to an hotel, you'll just call attention to yourself. That's not what you want."

"No." Forbes closed his eyes momentarily. "You're right, of course. How awful it all is. I hate this sort of thing. I hate publicity, these sordid situations."

"I know."

"Trust Ogilvie to let us in for something like this."

Baker made a wry face. "Poor devil, he couldn't help it. Have a heart."

Forbes lowered his voice. "Do they know who did it? Was it *her*?"

"I don't know. Why should it have been?"

Forbes was flustered. "She—oh, it's usually the wife in these cases. You know what Ogilvie was."

"Let's leave the police to work it out for themselves. That's what we pay taxes for." Baker made as if to walk past the other man and go to his room.

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Forbes stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Just a minute, Tom. I want to ask you something. Come in here." He drew Baker back into the bathroom.

"Well, what is it?"

"When they were questioning you, did you—did you mention that I left the room when we were together last night?"

"Did you leave the room, Jim? I'm damned if I can remember."

"Oh, well, it was only for a moment," said Forbes hastily. "It's not important. I thought you'd probably forgotten."

"Is that all? I really must be getting on."

Again Forbes laid a detaining hand on Baker's arm. "No—wait, Tom. There's something else."

"Yes?" Baker looked wearily patient.

"I saw something last night. I don't think it has any bearing on what happened. But I thought I'd mention it to you, and ask your advice. Last night—it was after two—that gramophone was keeping me awake. There was nothing I could do about it—I just lay there. Then I went along to the bathroom. I had some aspirin in my suitcase and I decided to take a couple. On the way back I thought I heard a noise downstairs, though there wasn't a light on. I leant across the railing and looked down just in time to see someone—in the dark I couldn't tell who it was—going into the drawing-room. It wasn't my business, and I hadn't any reason to think there was anything wrong; so I just went back to bed again and finally dozed off."

"Did you tell the Inspector this?"

"No. As a matter of fact I forgot all about it until just

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now. Well, what do you think, Tom? Should I go back and tell him now?"

Baker frowned thoughtfully. "The drawing-room it was, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't suppose it's relevant really. Ogilvie was killed in his bedroom, after all."

"Then you think I can forget it?"

"Yes, I shouldn't give it another thought." Affably he slapped him on the shoulder. "How're you feeling now? Better, eh?"

Forbes smiled weakly. "Yes, thanks. I'm all on edge, though."

"Why don't you toddle along and have a lie-down?" Baker said sympathetically.

"Perhaps I will. There's just one more thing. I just wondered—when you saw the Inspector just now, did he ask you what sort of terms I was on with Ogilvie?"

"Don't worry," Baker laughed, "I told him that you loved poor Henry with an unholy passion." Laughing he went on into his room.

"This gentleman's the last," said Leeds, as Richard Marinney crossed the threshold, closed the door quietly behind him, and came forward to face Harris.

"May I sit down?" he asked.

"Please do."

Marinney took the chair that still smelled of Ada Barton's cheap scent.

"You are Richard Marinney?"

He nodded.

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"You were an old friend of Mr. Ogilvie's?"

"A very old friend. Our parents knew each other before we were born."

"Then you knew him better than any of the other people involved in this case."

"No, Inspector, I'm afraid not. You see, we haven't met much during the last twenty-odd years."

"So this visit of yours was unusual?"

"Yes. I spent a couple of days here last year, but apart from that I have never stayed in the house before."

"In your opinion was there anything unusual about yesterday?"

"Nothing, as far as I remember. As you know, two other friends of Mr. Ogilvie's were invited here, too. The three of us lunched together, then separated and came back here for dinner."

"What time did you get back, Mr. Marinney?"

"About six."

"Did you see Mr. Ogilvie alone at any time?"

"Yes. I went to see him in his study just after I came in."

"For any special reason?"

"No, just to chat."

"And how did he strike you then?"

"Exactly as always."

"You and Mr. Ogilvie were on good terms?"

"Yes. I was fond of him."

"But other people weren't?"

"I wouldn't say that."

"Did he ever discuss his marriage with you, Mr. Marinney?"

Marinney barely hesitated. "Not in the way I think you

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mean. He used to tell me if anything of interest had happened to him or Sarah, but I wasn't in his confidence any more than that."

"Can you tell me what you talked about yesterday?"

"Oh, about the house. He was anxious to make some improvements. He was asking me about an architect I know."

"Nothing else?"

Marinney hesitated. "As a matter of fact, the question of some money I owed Ogilvie was touched on. I arranged to settle the debt at the end of the month."

"And Mr. Ogilvie was quite satisfied?"

"Yes, I think so."

"May I ask, Mr. Marinney, was there a large sum involved?"

"Not what Ogilvie would call large: a couple of hundred pounds."

"I see. And how did the rest of the evening go?"

"We all had dinner at about eight. Then Sarah—Mrs. Ogilvie—went upstairs and Stokes went out. The four of us were left together."

"Can you remember what you talked about?"

"Nothing in particular. Our careers, I believe. Yes, we discussed our respective jobs."

"How long did you stay downstairs?"

"About an hour, I suppose. We all went up to the drawing-room where we sat talking with Mrs. Ogilvie until about eleven."

"You say you *all* went up to the drawing-room, Mr. Marinney. But according to Mrs. Ogilvie you joined her ahead of the other three gentlemen."

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"Yes, I believe I did."

"Why was that, Mr. Marinney?"

"I hurried on upstairs. The others took longer to leave the dining-room."

"I see. And you left the drawing-room in company with Mr. Baker and Mr. Forbes at about eleven?"

"Yes. Henry and Sarah were still there."

"But you met Mr. Ogilvie accidentally in the kitchen later on?"

Marinney's look of surprise seemed genuine enough to Harris. "No. I think you must be mistaken, Inspector."

"Oh?"

"I didn't leave my room after eleven-fifteen. I was in the bathroom until then."

"You are quite sure of this, Mr. Marinney?"

"Of course I'm sure. I went straight to bed at eleven-fifteen and fell asleep immediately."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Marinney. There has been a mistake. To return to Mr. Ogilvie for a moment. What sort of terms would you say he and his wife were on?"

Marinney frowned. "The usual terms. They behaved to each other like any other married couple."

"Are you a cynic, Mr. Marinney?"

"I beg your pardon?"

Harris ignored this question and went on: "Were you surprised when he married at the age of—what was it—thirty-nine?"

"Not especially. I always thought he'd marry sooner or later. Mrs. Ogilvie was, perhaps, a strange choice."

"Oh? Why was that?"

A slight flush spread over Marinney's face. "Mrs. Ogilvie is a—a very attractive woman, but somehow she

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wasn't at all like the other women he'd been interested in."

"One gathers he'd had a good many women-friends."

"Yes, he had. That's something we all knew about him."

"Did his wife know, also?"

"No," said Marinney coldly. "In any case, I was referring to the time before his marriage."

"I see. What is your profession, Mr. Marinney?"

"I teach at a preparatory school in Dorset."

"Have you been there long?"

"Seven years."

"Are you married, Mr. Marinney?"

The answer was short in tone. "No."

"You won't be in a hurry to leave London, then?"

"No. I've business here. I'll be moving to a hotel."

"You'll give us your address?"

"Yes, of course. Will that be all, Inspector?"

"I think so, thank you, Mr. Marinney. Oh, just one thing more: you didn't hear anything unusual last night after going to your room?"

"Not a thing. Not even that gramophone that everyone is complaining about. But I'm on the third floor, down the corridor from Stokes, so I imagine I was rather out of things."

"Thank you, Mr. Marinney."

The schoolmaster nodded and went out.

His interviews over, Harris returned to Scotland Yard. Sitting gloomily at his desk, with the sandwich for which he had sent uneaten in front of him, he went over the

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notes that Leeds had typed up on their morning's work. Then he picked up the telephone and asked for Sir Clement Fraser's consulting room in Wimpole Street. A crisp-voiced secretary answered him. No, Sir Clement was not in; Sir Clement was in Edinburgh attending a medical conference. Yes, Sir Clement would be back to-morrow night; he would be in his consulting room at ten the following day. Yes, she thought he could spare the Detective-Inspector a few minutes before his first patient. "You won't be late, now will you?" she was saying, as he put down the phone.

A token knock at the door was followed by the entry of Collins, from the laboratory. "Here you are, Cap'n," he said breezily. He had been in the Navy. "Not quite what the doctor ordered, but good enough, I reckon."

On the desk he laid a series of photographs: the reconstruction of the little pile of ashes the Inspector had salvaged from the fireplace in the Ogilvies' drawing-room. "No, I couldn't do much for you," he went on, "but there's a fragment or two that may interest you: love letters, I'd say. It's a woman's handwriting all right."

Harris scrutinized the photos carefully. "Hm, yes," he said. "There's his name—Henry, you see"—he pointed with his forefinger—"and there's the word 'darling'—twice in fact. And what's this: 'must it always be like . . . ' No signatures? Pity." He shuffled the photographs together. "Thank you, Collins. I'm much obliged. From what I can make out about this bloke it'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack trying to find the woman who wrote these, but you never know. Thanks, anyway."

"Any time, Cap'n, any time." Collins touched an imaginary cap as he left the room.

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Once again Harris looked through the photographs. They didn't tell him much: only that someone—Ogilvie or perhaps his murderer—either way it pointed to much the same thing—had something to burn. He picked up the intercom to ask Sergeant Leeds to come in.

"Had your lunch, Leeds?" he asked. "Okay, then, I want you to cut along back to the Ogilvies' house, take these photographs, and see if you can find anything in writing that matches this. I doubt if you will—but it's routine."

Less than an hour later the telephone rang. Sergeant Leeds sounded a little breathless. "Are you sure?" the Inspector asked incredulously. Then, "Bring it back with you," he said, in a voice full of disappointment. But a moment later a thought visibly struck him, and his face brightened, as he hummed a little tune.

Seven

WHEN the boy had gone into the garden to play his eternal game of bouncing a tennis-ball against the fence, Ada turned on Barton, as though suddenly reminded of something. "What was this you told the detective about hearing a noise in the kitchen last night?"

Wearily he sat down again. "That was stupid, wasn't it? I couldn't help saying something. He kept on at me."

Her voice sharpened. "Did you really hear something? What did you hear?"

He shifted uneasily in his chair. "I heard the two of them there. I could hear the voices, but hardly anything of what they said." His eyes were lowered as he spoke.

"Which two?"

"The master and the mistress, of course. They were clattering about with the cups and saucers. And I heard her telling him to get away. That's all. The rest was only mumbling."

She came up behind him, excited. "You told the Inspector this?"

"Yes. I know I shouldn't have. But what harm can it do?"

"No harm, my dear," she said sweetly. "It's the best thing you ever said."

Now he looked round and up at her, apprehensively. "What do you mean? Is it trouble for the mistress you're pleased about?"

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She turned her back disdainfully. "Never mind. What else did you tell him?"

"You don't have to worry. I didn't put words into your mouth. I told him you slept through it all."

"You—*what?*" She was facing him again, trembling, aggressive, her pupils dilated.

"Well, what could I say? You knowing nothing. I thought it was best, in case he asked you, to say you were asleep. What's the matter with you?"

Looking tired and old, she sank down on to one of the chairs. "Never mind," she said again, but in a very different tone from before. "You've simply let him know about us. That's all. Now he'll find out everything. Leave it to him. He's clever, that one."

"Everything?" He threw her a bitter glance.

The first clap of thunder sounded outside, and they both turned to look through the window. The boy, undeterred by the rapidly darkening sky and the thunder, was still bouncing his ball against the fence. Barton made as if to rise. "Oh, leave him," said Ada fiercely. "He has sense enough to know when to come in. You just listen to me. I'll have to tell the truth about last night. If I tell the Inspector myself, it'll be better. I might get round him." Leaning on the table, she got up heavily, stood brooding for a moment, then left the kitchen with a sniff.

Half an hour later, when the storm had cleared away suddenly, Ada stood near the window of the dining-room, the ground-floor front room, and watched her husband and the boy disappear down the street. Satisfied, she saw them turn the corner. There had been no question of

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her doing the shopping, in her present state of nerves. Without being asked, her husband had suggested she give him a shopping-list: she had made it a long one; he would be out at least an hour—half an hour in Barkers alone. He had fallen in readily with her idea that the boy should go with him, for the sake of a walk. The little crowd that had hung about the door all morning had dispersed, in the wake of the Inspector, and only a constable on duty stood near the steps outside.

She smoothed her hair with her hand, then walked round the oblong table to look at herself in the gilt-framed looking-glass above the fireplace. As she gazed into it, the worried lines on her face were smoothed out and succeeded by a look of satisfaction. She felt in the pocket of her dress for a little zip-fastened purse, from which she took out her compact and lipstick. With care she made up her face. Then she put away the purse and dusted a few grains of powder from the mantelpiece. She touched her bright hair again, and smiled at her reflection.

Going upstairs to the top floor, she knocked at Stokes's door. Without waiting for an answer, she went in. Immediately she knew, by the momentary glance he gave her, that he was in a surly mood. "I'd better go away," she said resentfully. "You're so taken up with your work, now there's no one to keep you at it."

He pushed aside the papers on which he had been making notes, and turned to her. "Ada, what do you want? What a time to come up here."

"They're all out. No one's in the house but ourselves." She pouted. "And why do you ask me what I want? I don't want anything. I just came to see you. Do you mind?"

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"What do you want?" he repeated.

"All right, if you must know, I'm worried. And there's something to worry about, I can tell you."

He got up, his eyes alert. "Well, what is it?"

"The Inspector knows about us. I mean, he knows I was up here last night."

Stokes clenched his fists at his sides. "How could he? Who saw you?"

She pursed her lips and had to admit, reluctantly, "No one."

"Then *you* must have told him."

"What do you take me for?" she asked angrily. Then her expression softened. "Of course not, Gerry. Is it likely?"

"In that case how the devil does he know?" he demanded, bewildered and petulant. "His intuition, I suppose?"

"Come on, sit down," she said soothingly. "Don't make a scene."

"I can't stand all this. It's so damnably sordid. Why the hell can't they leave me alone?"

"You baby! I might have known no good would come."

"I'm sorry, Ada. But for God's sake tell me what's been going on."

"Only this: my fool of a husband told a story to the Inspector—oh, it's true enough—of his hearing Henry and *her* come down to the kitchen last night. I, of course, was supposed to have been asleep and heard nothing. But the blinking Inspector trapped me into saying I had heard it too." She assumed a little-girl look. "You can't blame me, Gerald, can you? How was I to know? That fool told

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me nothing. It was one of those things. So you see, the Inspector must know I wasn't with Barton." She smiled ruefully. "I think it would be best for us to go to him and admit the truth."

Seeing that he looked unconvinced, she added, "Stop thinking of yourself all the time. It's worse for me than you. I'm a married woman. No one cares what a man does with his private life."

"I care," he said. "I'll have to get out of here as quickly as possible. I don't want a lot of unpleasant publicity."

"All you've got to do is to go to the Inspector and tell him this: he'll keep it to himself, as it won't have any bearing on Henry's death. After all, we provide each other with an alibi," she added slyly.

Stokes hesitated, obviously struck with her reasoning.

She took his hand, which was still clenched in a fist, unfolded it and stroked it. "In any case, Gerry, he'll find out, now Barton's got us into this mess. If you go and tell him, and not wait for him to come to you, at least you stand the chance of his behaving decently and keeping it quiet."

"I suppose you're right," he admitted, with a sigh of resignation, flinging himself down again in his chair. He smiled indulgently. "You want me to speak to him, Ada?"

"Well, you *are* both men. It can't be expected of me. Men understand these things, don't they, darling?"

"Seducer," he said playfully, pulling her on to his lap. "You can twist me round your little finger, can't you, Ada?"

"You're sweet," she said, kissing him. Then she laid an admonitory finger on his lips. "So you'll tell that wicked

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Inspector that little Ada came here just before midnight and we were together till three, four or whenever it was?"

He was not taken in by her baby-talk. Frowning, he said: "But, Ada, it was a quarter to one—or later, I think—when you came to me."

"No, Gerry! It can't have been."

"I should know. I was waiting. I kept looking at my watch."

"It must have been fast. I know it wasn't yet twelve."

"I may be mistaken, I suppose. But my watch keeps perfect time. Anyway, what does it matter what time it was?"

"Don't you see," she moaned, "I'd have to explain how I didn't meet Henry and *her* in the kitchen, as my idiot husband said he'd heard them at twelve? I don't want to get involved. Please! Just make it easier all round by saying I got here before twelve."

"All right, all right. I'll do it." He pretended to grumble, but his hold on her tightened. Then suddenly he laid his head down, in a tired gesture like a child's, on her ample breasts. She stroked his hair gently; but her face, which he could not see, was grim and calculating.

Presently he lifted up his head a little, to ask her, "And what about Sarah? Where does she fit in?"

"Where do you think?"

"I can't believe she killed him."

"Who else had a motive, and who else was with him?"

He shook his head. "No, it wasn't her. She couldn't have done it."

"How do you know?" she asked contemptuously. "All

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that sweetness and light is just an act. Trust you men to be taken in."

"I'm sorry for her. Even if she did kill him. After all he was a devil to live with."

"Was he? Much you know."

He pushed her away from him. "Yes, you're the one who knows."

"Oh, shut up."

"Why should I? He's dead now, and I've got some rights, too."

"Not over me, you haven't." She tried to get up, but he would not let her go.

"I want to know all about you and Ogilvie."

"It was nothing," she said softly; "all a waste of time. You know the kind of man he was." Her face relaxed and coloured slightly. She looked younger. "But I'll tell you something. He did—like me."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, he treated me differently. Not like the others. You'd never believe he could be so gentle."

Stokes laughed cruelly. "No, I'd never believe it. Sounds like the parlourmaid's dream. Come off it, Ada."

"That's enough," she said sharply. "He was a better man than you." She rose from his lap and shook out her skirt.

"I dare say. But he's dead. He can't help you now. And I can, eh, Ada?"

She was silent.

"Well, never mind, I'll do it. I'll tell the Inspector just exactly what you want me to. Fair enough? But suppose *you* tell *me*: how was it you *didn't* run into Ogilvie and Sarah in the kitchen last night?"

Eight

MARINNEY let himself out of the front door. Immediately he wished that, like Sarah, he had used the garden gate, for there were little knots of people hanging about the house somewhat self-consciously, as though they had just happened to be passing. A young man in a mackintosh and a brown trilby detached himself quickly from one of the groups and shambled up to him. "Excuse me, sir," he began, "I represent the *Echo*——"

"I'm sorry," Marinney said, as he hurried on, "I have nothing to tell you."

"But look here, sir," the young man persisted, pattering along the street behind him, while the onlookers turned to watch the game, one or two of them beginning to follow too. "All I want is——"

Marinney stopped in his tracks so abruptly that the reporter nearly collided into him. Deliberately he turned round to face the young man. "Now *you* look here," he said, quite kindly, but with unmistakable firmness, "as I said before, I haven't anything to tell you. I'm sorry."

Something in his manner deterred the reporter, who followed him half-heartedly for a few yards, then fell back and returned disconsolately to his vigil outside the house. An elderly woman made a clicking sound of sympathy. "You've got to live, haven't you?" she said with a sniff.

At the corner Marinney hesitated, then turned north

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Without an overcoat, he shivered slightly in the brisk autumn wind, and strode faster, through the dull streets of grey houses, past oppressive, dark-red Victorian blocks. These were expensive flats, he pondered, watching a smartly-uniformed porter working to improve the already high polish of the brass rail at either side of some marble steps. A young nurse with a pram turned the corner and the grey-haired porter left his polishing to help her lift it into the hall. Everything had an air of cheerful normality.

When he came to the High Street he had to force his way through the lunch-time crowds milling round the shop-windows. He crossed and went on to the right. Even here the press of people made him slow down. Breaking away from them at last, he entered the Gardens.

It was peaceful here in the long, light vista, the springy grass rising gently to the level of the Round Pond. There were not many people about: just a few odd strollers, whistling to their dogs. Taking the path that was farthest to the left, he saw that only one of the benches was occupied. A woman in a black coat sat huddled dejectedly on it. She was hatless, and her reddish-brown hair fell untidily over her forehead. It was Sarah.

In the same instant that Marinney recognized her, she raised her head and with a start saw him. He could not pretend not to have noticed her; after a moment's hesitation, he walked on and sat down beside her. "You were right," he said quietly, "not to want to be shut up indoors."

There were the marks of tears on her cheeks. Brushing a hand across her eyes, she said, with faint irony, "I suppose I needn't make any excuse for being like this."

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"I'm afraid I'm intruding."

"Don't make me feel a hypocrite!" she said defiantly, as though expecting this to shock him.

But he replied: "Why should you?" and then added, "We all feel a great deal less than we think we ought to, you know."

She looked up at the sky, which was beginning to cloud over. "Everything seems to have fallen to pieces. I just don't know who I am or what I've done."

"It's a natural reaction," he said gently. "But you haven't *done* anything."

"How do you know? I might have killed Henry. I did, in a way."

"No, Sarah," he said, in a quiet, firm voice, "that's all nonsense."

Dully she said: "You just don't know. You can't know." Then, with a flash of anger in her tone, "Yes, of course you do. I'd forgotten. He'd told you everything."

"Not everything. Only that he hadn't changed."

"Hadn't changed?"

"He was always a restless man. He could never settle down. You can't blame yourself for that."

"I can blame myself for keeping him tied to me." She shook her head. "Don't waste any sympathy on me, Richard. I'm just suffering from remorse. In the circumstances it's inevitable."

"I understand, of course, how you feel."

"If you understand then you must see that I ruined his life."

"Far from it. Oh, I'm not denying that your marriage was not the success you might have hoped for, but that

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wasn't your fault. And Henry did love you, you know—in his own way."

"Love me? Yes, I used to think he did. But the fact was that I made him terribly unhappy. And now he's dead."

"I don't believe you did make him so unhappy. I've known Henry longer than almost anyone, and I'll tell you what I think: I think you made him as happy as any woman could have done."

"That wasn't very happy."

"Maybe not. But it wasn't your fault. He just wasn't predisposed to be happy, that's all. Henry was never really satisfied: he always wanted something more, something different. He wanted to try marriage, but, once married, he wanted to be free."

"You're saying all this to be kind to me."

"Of course. But it also happens to be true."

They sat in silence for a while, and Marinney thought, looking at her pale, brooding face, that she seemed a little less strained. Then she turned to him suddenly and asked: "Was Henry murdered? Could he really have been murdered?"

"That's what the police seem to think," he murmured.

"It's incredible! That's what I can't accept. Oh, God, if only he could have died in some natural way." She began to cry again, pressing an already wet handkerchief to her mouth, as though to stifle her sobs. Wretchedly he watched her, appalled by his inability to help. A severe-looking woman passing with two Pekineses on a lead stared at them in frank curiosity.

Sarah dabbed at her eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm making an exhibition of myself. I'll try to be better."

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“Don’t worry.” He patted her lightly on the shoulder. “Want a dry handkerchief?” She nodded gratefully as he handed it to her.

“You see,” she said, as she dried her face, “we quarrelled last night. He asked me for a divorce. At first I refused him—I felt we ought to go on *trying*, at least—but then suddenly I realized it was all futile: we should never understand each other. But he told you all this, in the kitchen, didn’t he?”

“I didn’t see him in the kitchen. Upstairs, in his study, before dinner.”

“Not in the kitchen? But he told me—I’m sure he said——”

“He spoke to me earlier. I wasn’t in the kitchen at all, Sarah.”

“How terrible,” she murmured. “So he told someone else. Told someone else all about our marriage. I don’t mind your knowing—not any more. But to think that he wanted everyone to know what our life together was like—it’s awful.”

“Perhaps you misunderstood him. Perhaps he didn’t speak to anyone in the kitchen. He might have been referring to the talk we had before dinner.”

She shook her head. “No. No, I don’t think so.” The sky had darkened now, and she looked up nervously, as if to gauge the possibility of a storm.

“Aren’t you cold sitting here?” he asked.

“Not especially.” Then she noticed that he had no overcoat, and she sat up straighter and exclaimed: “But you—you must be cold!”

“Oh, no, I’m quite all right. But I think it’s going to rain. Have you had any lunch?”

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"I'm not hungry."

"Well, I'm afraid I am. Won't you keep me company?"

"If you like." She got up from the bench a little stiffly, and they began to walk back the way he had come, towards the gate. A first clap of thunder, far-off and faint, sent them hurrying on, through the gate and out to the road. It had begun to rain. The first thick drops pelting about them, they dashed into a dark, brown-panelled restaurant, where the frivolous caps of the waitresses and the many trays of pastel-coloured iced cakes seemed the grimmest of jests against the day's tragedy.

Lunch—with which Sarah had toyed abstractedly—over, they sat slowly drinking their coffee, hardly speaking. When the waitress had cleared all the other tables and was sighing in her draughty corner, they finally left the restaurant. The storm had been brief; already the pavements outside were dry. They wandered, still silent, along Kensington Road towards Palace Gate. By the bus-stop there he hesitated, but she said abruptly: "I don't want to go home—not just yet."

"As you like, of course. But there's nothing to be afraid of there."

"Please!" she pleaded. "I can't face them—not yet. And the reminders of Henry everywhere. It's more than I can stand."

"Then we won't go back yet. You're sure you wouldn't rather be alone?"

She shook her head. "No, please don't leave me. If I were alone I think I might go crazy. Murder! If only he hadn't died like that! One can't believe in these things.

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'One leads a quiet, civilized life—oh, one has one's problems, one's differences, but those are part of the pattern. An act of violence, something like a murder: it makes the pattern disappear. I could accept death—ordinary death—but this sort of death"—she shuddered—"it's too unnatural."

"I know," he said gently, "but you'll see, the horror of it will wear off in time."

They walked on. Marinney looked at her anxiously as they passed a newspaper seller with a poster on which had been scrawled: WELL-KNOWN ECONOMIST DEATH INQUIRY, but she seemed wrapped in her own thoughts and unaware of what was going on around her.

"I'm glad you'll stay in the house till it's all settled," she said suddenly. "You don't mind staying on?"

"No, of course not. I'm glad that you've asked me."

She gave a bitter little laugh. "I may need your help. I suppose they think I did it."

He tried to smile. "Why should they?"

Her eyes glittered: he could see that she was on the verge of hysteria. "Motive. Opportunity." The words were spat out. "Who else?"

"They'll uncover the truth. Don't worry."

"The truth! But what *could* be the truth? Who could have done it? Who could have hated him that much?"

"Who did, in fact, dislike Henry?" he asked.

"Dislike?" she echoed. "Somehow I can't equate *dislike* and murder." Then she shook her head, as though to clear it of confusion. "I'm sorry. You're trying to help, and I'm being stupid."

"Not stupid, just unrealistic. One knows so little about people—about the inner workings of their minds. Some-

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one quite unexpected might feel he had a motive for murdering Henry."

Again she laughed bitterly. "You, for instance?"

"Me, for instance," he replied, quite seriously.

"No, I don't think so, Richard," she said, equally serious now. "One has to be able to trust *somebody*, you know. Now Gerald," she mused, "I believe he didn't care for Henry. Henry never spared him. Henry never spared anyone, did he? But still, I don't think Gerald would have killed him. Six months ago—yes, perhaps—but lately he's been different."

"How different?"

"Sort of patronizing with Henry. As though in some way he had the upper hand. I don't think Henry noticed he'd changed: Henry didn't seem to notice much about people."

They waited at the corner of Prince's Gate for an opportunity to cross, then continued towards Knightsbridge. "Perhaps," said Marinney thoughtfully, "Henry did notice. Perhaps there was something going on between them. Stokes might *have* had the upper hand, as you say."

Her pace was flagging, and he had to walk more slowly to allow her to keep up. But she insisted that she was not tired.

"What about Baker and Forbes?" she asked. "I know nothing about them."

"And I nothing that isn't twenty-five years old. I must say, we were an odd quartet at school: it's not surprising that we didn't keep up with each other."

"I rather like Baker," Sarah said. "He's easy. Was he like that as a boy?"

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"Oh, yes, he was a nice enough chap. His parents doted on him: they had money in those days, and I suppose he was a bit spoilt. He and Henry used to run around together—they were better off than the rest of us."

"Forbes is rather an old woman, isn't he?"

Marinney laughed. "That's what Henry used to call him: he could always get poor Forbes's back up with a taunt."

"Have you any idea why Henry should have invited you all?"

"Not really. I suppose it was a sign that he, like the rest of us, was getting older and wanted to remember his youth."

"I don't think it was that. I think he wanted to show off—to let the rest of you see what a success he'd made of his life."

Marinney shrugged his shoulders. "Could be. Well, it wasn't very difficult: when we all talked about our jobs last night it was pretty obvious that he was the only one who'd really made the grade."

"There you are, you see!" she said, almost triumphantly. "That's what Henry was like." Her face was troubled as she went on, with a curious mixture of reluctance and vehemence, "You must think me very disloyal. But sometimes I wonder what life could have been like if I'd never met Henry. We'd only been married six weeks when he told me that we'd made a mistake. And then we became like strangers. Well, it was all my own fault. I accepted his proposal so lightly—just because I was feeling lonely and he said he loved me and it seemed enough. But it wasn't any good. How could it be, in those circumstances? I always felt a stranger in his house. We just didn't

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understand each other—even know each other—and he wouldn't try. *I* tried, but it isn't enough for one person to do the trying." She took an unsteady breath. "Already I'm beginning to forget what he was like. It's terrible. So you see why I dread going back to his house, the house he was born in. It's not my home, and I have no right to be there. The Bartons and Gerald have more right in it than I have. I just don't belong."

"And you won't have to stay there," he said quietly. "Once all this is over."

"No, I'll get away. Somehow I'll get away." Her face was white and her voice high and strained. "You know, I never loved him. I admired him. I must have been mad to marry him just because of that."

"Well, the score's even, Sarah. If you're worried about Henry being unhappy you can tell yourself that you were hurt just as much as he was. More. After all, you expected more."

Quieter now, she smiled bleakly as she said: "Yes, I suppose that's true."

They continued to walk, without thinking of the time or where they were going. The wind had sharpened, but a few watery streaks of late afternoon sunlight dappled the windows of the houses and lit up an occasional puddle in the gutter. In spite of herself Sarah felt a sudden warmth and relief. Impulsively she turned to Marinney. "You've been very kind," she said, "putting up with all my nonsense."

He smiled. "I mean to help you, Sarah, if I can."

"You'll only make trouble for yourself."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It's of no consequence. I've nothing to lose."

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“Your job——” she protested.

He laughed lightly. “My precious job! I don’t think I need worry about that. And as for the rest—no one depends on me, and I on no one. So you see, Sarah, I’m quite free to be of what use you choose to put me to.” Immediately he had spoken he seemed embarrassed, and looking at his watch, he said in an exaggeratedly normal tone: “Four o’clock already. Let’s go and get ourselves a cup of tea.”

Nine

IT was dark when Sarah and Marinney returned to the house. The onlookers had all gone home, and even the persistent reporter had deserted his post. Only the solitary constable paced up and down outside the door. With a nod to him they went in, Sarah noticing uneasily as she turned the key that the light was on in the drawing-room: the curtains had not yet been drawn.

She and Marinney went upstairs together. Outside the drawing-room they parted, he going on up to his room. Bracing herself for the encounter, she opened the door to find, as she expected, Inspector Harris waiting for her. He was standing on the hearthrug; only one of the lamps had been lit, and in the grotesque uneven light he looked taller and gaunter than ever.

Grateful for something to do, she crossed to the windows and drew the curtains. At the farthest window, by the bureau, she waited for a moment, before turning round to face him. "Sit down, Inspector," she said coolly. "I hope you've been making yourself at home." She sat down herself on an upright chair, holding her back stiffly. Harris, after a minute's hesitation, took one of the arm-chairs. Half the room was between them, much of it in shadow.

"I'd begun to be worried about you, Mrs. Ogilvie," he said reproachfully.

"That's kind of you. What did you imagine had happened to me?"

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"You've been missing"—he emphasised the word—"since this morning."

"Missing, Inspector? Do you wish me to account for my time?"

Harris leant forward. "That won't be necessary. But I'm afraid I shall have to ask you some more questions. You weren't quite truthful with me earlier, you know."

She stood up. "I beg your pardon, Inspector?"

He stood up likewise, and his height, as always, gave him the advantage. "At twelve last night, or rather, a little after, you and Mr. Ogilvie were heard together in the kitchen. How do you reconcile this with your story of his going down there alone, and getting into conversation with Mr. Marinney?"

"You're trying to trap me in some way."

"Why should you fear a trap, if you're being straightforward with me?"

She took a step backward, made a tentative movement as though to sit down again, then changed her mind. "It's true that I've since found out that Mr. Marinney was not in the kitchen with my husband. But that I was not there either is also emphatically true. Whoever told you that I was lying, and must have some reason of his own—that you ought to look into—for lying."

"Perhaps. It's for me to decide who's telling the truth."

"Well, who is this person?"

"I'm afraid I'm not in a position to tell you that."

She turned away deliberately. "There's another thing, Mrs. Ogilvie," he said. "Do you deny going down to the kitchen not long after dinner to see Mrs. Barton?"

"Certainly not. Why should I? I went down there to discuss today's meals with her."

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"Ah. But you did not mention this when I questioned you this morning as to your movements."

"It slipped my mind, I suppose. In the circumstances, you know, Inspector, it is not easy to remember these trivial domestic details."

"Quite so." The long silence in the room was broken by the chiming of the clock on the mantelpiece. The tinkling sound recalled Harris to his duty. "Mrs. Ogilvie," he began, "I know that you and your husband disagreed about money."

Angrily she turned round to face him. "If you know so much of my affairs, why waste time questioning me? There seem to be others in this house who co-operate sufficiently."

"I'm just doing my job," he said, adding pointedly, "I'm not prejudiced for or against anyone. I'd like to hear your side of the story. You can tell me what grounds, if any, your husband had for complaining that you spent too much."

"Why do you pry into things that have nothing to do with your inquiry? You persist in asking me about my private affairs. Have you no consideration for my feelings, Inspector?"

"In an inquiry of this kind nothing can be private."

She smiled bitterly. "You want to see my petty accounts—my bills and theatre-ticket stubs?"

"Nothing of the kind. I have here a detailed, carefully-kept account book belonging to your husband. In this he appears to have entered a record of all his financial transactions. It shows several large amounts paid to you—as well as the regular smaller ones that are put down as your allowance." He made a deprecating gesture. "Now all I

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want to know, Mrs. Ogilvie, is what these large sums of money represent. If you've had some secret extravagance, some expensive curio-buying or something of the kind, why, of course, it's no one's affair but your own. Just give me the particulars, I'll make a few simple inquiries, and neither you nor anyone else will hear any more of the matter."

"You put it reasonably," she admitted, without hostility. "But all the same, I can't do what you ask."

He flushed. "After what I've just told you, it seems—I'm bound to say—a highly suspicious act."

"I'm sorry if that's how it strikes you, Inspector. I can tell you this, however, for what it's worth: any money I had from my husband had nothing to do with his death. I give you my assurance."

"Not good enough," he said coldly.

She said nothing.

"Very well, then, to return to the other matter. What about your account of your husband's going to the kitchen alone and meeting someone there? You wish to stick to that story?"

"Certainly. It is the truth."

"And one thing more. I must ask you about this young man you've been seen with. Who is he, Mrs. Ogilvie?"

She recoiled, her eyes widening with shock.

"You've no right to ask that."

"I have to remind you, Mrs. Ogilvie, that I'm here to investigate a very serious case. It's for me to decide what's relevant to that case."

She put her hand up to her face. "I can tell you that this isn't relevant."

"And I tell you, that kind of answer is not good enough."

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"I'm sorry. I can give you no other."

"You're doing yourself a good deal of harm, you know, Mrs. Ogilvie."

"Perhaps," she said quietly. "That's my affair."

Harris shrugged his shoulders. "Very well."

"Will that be all, Inspector? Or shall I ask Mrs. Barton to lay an extra place for dinner?"

"Thank you," he replied gravely, "that will not be necessary. I also have a home, you know."

A little ashamed of her sarcasm, Sarah smiled defensively and said, "I'm sorry, Inspector, if I'm being difficult, but this has been an exceptionally tiring day."

"Of course," he said, a little stiffly. "I must apologize for making it more so, but I'm afraid I have to do my job—not a very enviable one, perhaps. May I go up to your husband's study now? There are one or two things I need to look at."

She nodded. "By now you know the way, I expect."

After Harris had gone, Sarah waited until his footsteps on the stairs had died away, then shut the drawing-room door and rang the bell. In a few moments Barton answered it.

"Yes, madam?" he asked.

"Come in, Barton, and shut the door behind you."

He did so and came discreetly a few steps towards her.

"Barton," she said, clasping her hands together suddenly, "I haven't had more than a few words with you since——" She frowned. "I want you to help me."

Ignoring his deprecating, humble gesture, she went on: "Perhaps you *can* help me. This Inspector—he was here just now—seems to think I know more than I admit about Mr. Ogilvie's death. It appears that certain people have

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told him a great deal about my private affairs. I suppose I've no right to object to this. They ask questions, and all of you have to speak the truth. Some—discussions of mine with Mr. Ogilvie may have been overheard; and this had to come out when the police asked their questions. So don't think I blame you for having to tell what you heard and knew. But someone has told him an out-and-out lie—for what reason I can't imagine. I intend to find out and challenge this person." She was walking back and forth between the chair and the windows. "Barton," she said, looking directly in his face, "you were in your room, I take it, at midnight last night?"

His lips worked soundlessly, then he managed to say, in a hoarse, low voice: "Yes, I was."

"I know you're not a sound sleeper. You've often told me about it." She came close to him. "Last night were you awakened by anyone in the kitchen after twelve?"

He looked acutely pained. "Yes," he admitted, after a pause.

She continued, on a rising note, almost of triumph: "You heard the clatter Mr. Ogilvie made with the cups?"

"Yes, I did."

"So you heard him! Thank God! You can tell the Inspector then, that I wasn't down there with him." She looked ready to cry with relief.

Barton's eyes widened, his jaw thrust forward slowly, with a difficult resolution, and at last he said: "I'm afraid, madam, I can't help it, I'm sorry—I heard you both talking together."

She stared at him, incredulous.

"I'm sorry, madam. I wish I'd been asleep."

"Perhaps you were," she cried. "Perhaps you dreamt it."

A gleam appeared in his eye. "Is that possible?" Then he shook his head. "It couldn't be. It was all so clear. I know I woke up. I looked at my watch. I heard the clattering, and then I heard both your voices. I even heard——"

"What?"

He shook his head again. "Nothing. But I know I was wide-awake."

Sarah sank down heavily on to a chair, as though her legs could no longer support her. "But I wasn't in the kitchen last night. I wasn't." Gazing down at her hands, which were folded in her lap, she mumbled, "There's some mistake."

When she looked up again, with half-closed eyes, he was still standing there. "You heard two voices, Mr. Ogilvie's and someone else's. But the other voice wasn't mine: that's all. How could you be sure of the voice?"

"I know your voice, madam."

She wrinkled her forehead in an agonized expression. "Barton, do you *want* to think it was me?"

He said nothing.

"You see," she continued wearily and slowly, as though speaking to a child, "someone was in the kitchen with my husband. You *did* hear voices, but not mine. After all, you couldn't hear them well enough to know what they said."

"But I did hear a word or two. At one moment you raised your voice and asked Mr. Ogilvie to leave something to you. I was sure of the voice, then."

"Go away, Barton." She stood up quickly. "No, wait, please. I don't understand. I must try to understand. Why should you lie? You don't dislike me, do you? I'd counted

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on you to help me." She covered her eyes with her hand. "It's not possible that you're right. I couldn't have made myself forget, could I?" Then she let her hand fall, and she saw that Barton's face was twisted with pain. "Go away now, Barton."

The butler left her. When she was alone, she sat and stared at the hearthrug, where Henry had stood when she had seen him last.

A knock at the door recalled her from her unhappy thoughts. It was the Inspector. "May I come in again, for a moment, Mrs. Ogilvie?" he asked, in a gentler tone than before.

Wearily she assented. Her encounter with Barton seemed to have drained her of all spirit, to have left her weak and defenceless. She remained seated, but Harris continued to stand by the door.

"There is one other matter I wish to raise with you, Mrs. Ogilvie."

"Yes?"

"Some letters were burnt last night in that grate. From the remains I have been able to ascertain that they were in your handwriting, addressed, I believe, to your husband. Can you throw any light on this?"

"Last night?" she said faintly. "Was it really only last night? Yes, Inspector, they were my letters. I burnt them."

Harris hesitated, as though expecting a sharp response. "May I ask why you burnt them?"

"I suppose so, Inspector," she replied unexpectedly. "I dare say you have a right to know. But it's a little difficult to explain. Are you married, Inspector Harris?"

Surprised, he answered: "Why, no, I'm not."

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"In that case it is a little hard to understand. But you see I think there must come a time in most married people's lives when they feel they should destroy the letters they have written to each other. Last night I felt that the moment had come for me. That's all there was to it."

"I see. But why——?"

"I'm sorry, Inspector, but I don't think there is any more I can say. If you will excuse me——" He could see that she was near to tears, and with a murmured, "Good evening, Mrs. Ogilvie," he left the room.

As they drove away from the house he turned to Sergeant Leeds. "You know, Leeds, I'll be sorry if I have to arrest her. I must be growing old—I'm getting sentimental. But why"—he continued the sentence that Sarah had not allowed him to finish—"why last night?"

As soon as the front door had closed behind Inspector Harris, Sarah went upstairs to the room that had been Henry's bedroom. Since Stokes's discovery of his body she had not set foot here. Everything was perfectly neat and orderly, as Henry would have wished it to be.

Awed, she stood for a moment on the threshold before going in. The fact of his death gave the room an atmosphere, as though it must hold some obvious clue to the mystery.

How old was the boy? He had told her: twenty-five. Born in 1932. But in 1931 Henry had been only seventeen. He must have been still at school.

Calmer, trying to think of this now as an abstract

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problem, she opened the top right-hand drawer of the tallboy. In this drawer, among other personal papers, Henry kept his old appointment-diaries.

The contents of the drawer looked slightly disarranged. She opened the folder of diaries, and tipped them out on to the top of the tallboy. Hastily she went through the pile, not really expecting to find such an early one as 1931. Most likely he hadn't even kept a diary then.

But Henry, it seemed, had always been precise and methodical, even as a boy. The oldest of the little books was dated 1928.

Opening the diary for 1931, she began to turn carefully through the pages, reading all the entries. Most of them were school-events: matches, plays, exams; and occasionally an evening at the theatre or a party with friends. Among other names were those of Marinney, Baker and Forbes; and twice, apparently, Forbes's parents had given parties in London.

Then, as the entry for April 5th, she read: "L., 6:15, North Gate". A few days later there was a similar entry about "L". These meetings with "L" continued, growing more frequent, until the beginning of May, and then stopped completely. But the entry for June 4th was only the words "Poor L".

There was no further reference to "L" in 1931 or 1932.

Automatically Sarah replaced the diaries in their folder, and was rearranging the contents of the drawer, when she heard the door open quietly.

Startled into looking guilty, she turned and saw Marinney, who was shutting the door behind him. In the dim light his shadowed figure frightened her momentarily. "I've been looking for you," he said; then, coming for-

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ward, exclaimed anxiously, "Why, what's the matter! You're not feeling well!"

"The Inspector's been here again," she told him. "Pinning me down." She shook her head slowly; her eyes were unfocused. "I don't care what happens. It really doesn't matter any longer."

"What's happened?"

"Nothing. Oh, Richard, I shouldn't have talked to you about Henry! I've been disloyal. You were his oldest friend. I was nothing to him."

Her face was bright and strange. Delayed shock, thought Marinney.

"I was looking through Henry's diaries," she said, closing the drawer. "There was something I was curious about."

"I'm sorry I disturbed you. I'd been down to the drawing-room but you weren't there, and then I saw the light on in here."

"That's all right. As a matter of fact I think you can help me. I want to know about your last year at school with Henry: 1931."

"Yes?"

"Did Henry—was he having an affair with a woman?"

Marinney looked at her in surprise.

"Oh, I know it's an odd thing to ask. But I've a better reason than you may imagine."

He frowned, trying to remember. "Henry was always inclined to boast about his exploits in the holidays. But I don't remember any particular woman: I always took his stories with a grain of salt." He shook his head. "No, honestly, Sarah, I don't think there was anyone. After all, we were only schoolboys."

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"No one? No girl?"

"Oh, girls. Yes, I suppose he knew a few. But so did we all. We met them at parties. It was all very casual. They kept their distance, and I, for one, was much too shy to do anything about them."

"But Henry—Henry wasn't shy? Do you remember any girls that he knew?"

"That's rather an impossible question, after twenty-five years. The only ones I might remember are the boys' sisters."

"Yes?"

"Well, there was Hammond's sister. She was the prettiest."

"What was her name?"

"Let me see. Edna. No, something else beginning with an 'E'. Edith. That was it."

"Oh," said Sarah, disappointed. "Any others?"

He looked doubtful. "Oh, of course there was Forbes's sister."

"Forbes? Do you mean *our* Forbes?"

"Yes. His parents gave two or three parties, I remember. But I can't recall much about his sister—I think she was rather a quiet, mousy girl. Now what was her name? Damn, I've lost it now. Celia. No, it wasn't Celia. Yes, of course: Lucy. Lucy Forbes."

Sarah turned away from him to hide her excitement.

"You're not well," he said, touching her on the arm. "Why don't you go to bed?"

Impulsively she turned round. "I want to ask your advice."

He waited, a look of encouragement on his face.

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"I haven't told anyone about this. Now I don't know what to do." Again she paused.

"Go on," he said.

"About six months ago I had a letter, a rather illiterate one, asking me to come to the Bandstand in Kensington Gardens at a certain time. No explanation or reason was given. I was just told to keep this appointment. Out of curiosity I went. Do you think that was foolish?"

"No. Not necessarily."

"I suppose I should have taken someone else with me. But I went alone."

He smiled. "I would have done the same."

"When I got to the Bandstand I waited for quarter of an hour before the other person showed up. I was rather enjoying myself: I thought it an amusing adventure. Then a man came up to me casually, hands in his pockets, and asked me if I was Mrs. Ogilvie. When I told him I was, he said, just like that, 'I've got news for you. We're related.'"

"I waited for an explanation, while he half-turned his back on me to light a cigarette. His whole manner was insolent. He was young, about twenty-five, and he looked untidy and dirty. Under all the grubbiness and swagger, though, he was rather a handsome boy.

"Then he said, 'Tell me about your husband.'"

"I was taken aback and said nothing.

" 'How long have you been married?' he fired at me.

" 'Four years,' I told him.

"Then he laughed. 'Well, well, so it took him twenty-one years to get round to it.'"

"At this point an idea of who he was, a wild idea, crossed my mind. 'Why did you write to me?' I asked.

" 'Like I told you,' he replied. 'We're related. I'm your

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stepson.' He was watching the effect of his words on me. As I said, I'd already vaguely guessed, but nevertheless I was shaken. He had a rather unpleasant smirk on his face."

"So that's why you asked me if Henry had had an affair," Marinney interposed. "Well, I'll be damned!"

She nodded and went on: "'I've never heard of you before,' I said, trying to sound calm.

"'Why should you have? *He* doesn't even know. He isn't ever going to know, see?'

"I sat down at the edge of the Bandstand. He continued to stand, looking down at me. Nervously I asked the first question that came to my mind. 'Who was your mother?'

"'That's none of your business,' he answered curtly.

"I tried to avoid his stare. 'What do you want with me?'

"'It was his turn to hesitate now. 'I'm not sure yet.'

"'But you asked me to come here,' I said.

"'Yes.' He walked round in a half-circle, and then said impatiently, 'You wouldn't understand.'

"Suddenly I felt sorry for him. I thought he looked pathetic at that moment, with his bluster and bravado. 'You might as well tell me what's wrong,' I said.

"'Oh, what's the use,' he answered. 'It's nothing you can help.' Then he faced me again. 'I hate him, that's what. I hate your precious husband.'

"'Then the best thing would be to forget him,' I said.

"'I wish I could. But he's like a bad dream. I can't stop thinking about him. All the time, as if I was crazy.'

"For some reason it had never crossed my mind that he might have made the whole story up. And now, when he turned on me wildly, he had a strong look of Henry.

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'You won't tell him anything about me, will you?' he demanded.

" 'Not if you don't want me to,' I answered slowly.

" 'Not on your life I don't. I just wanted to talk to you. But now that you're here, I don't even know why. So it's all just fine.' He kicked something in the grass and cursed at me or it. Then he said he had to go. He made me promise to meet him again the next week.

"I kept the appointment, and subsequent ones. I suppose he appeals to my protective instincts. Often I've given him money, for one thing or another, but I have the feeling it isn't really the money he's after. In his twisted, perverse way he just feels the need of a contact with his father."

"Yes," Marinney said, reflectively. "Has he told you much about himself?"

"Not much. He's twenty-five and he's never had a steady job. I gather he's got involved with some shady people. This makes me even more concerned for him. But I've never found out where he lives or even what his surname is. I just know his Christian name, Michael. I saw him yesterday—was it only yesterday? It seems an age ago."

"What about his mother?"

"I assume she's dead. He never mentions her. I don't like to ask. But now, I wonder——" She broke off abruptly, and went across to switch on the electric fire. "I shouldn't have troubled you with all this, Richard, only the Inspector asked me just now about Michael."

"How on earth did he find out?"

"Someone saw me with him, I suppose. As a matter of fact Michael came here one day. He was drunk, and he'd

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followed me. I sent him away, I thought, before anyone saw him. But I suppose one of the Bartons must have seen."

"The Inspector has no business prying into your personal affairs," said Marinney indignantly.

"Well, as he told me, everything's grist to his mill. I don't know what he suspects. But he seems to think the least little thing significant."

"What did you say, when he asked about the boy?"

"I refused to answer. Was that very unwise?"

"Probably. Never mind. It's not too late to tell him now."

"I'm not sure that I do want to tell him. I'll think about it."

"Don't be foolish, Sarah."

There was a long silence, then she said: "You see, I promised Michael I wouldn't tell anyone about him. And I've already told you."

"But, my dear, you owe it to yourself not to let this policeman go on thinking what he likes about you. When you promised the boy you never thought of a—a tragic situation like this. Besides, it's hardly an important promise."

"It's important to him."

"I don't know what to say to you. I've a good mind to go to the Inspector myself."

She looked at him evenly. "You wouldn't do that."

"No, I wouldn't," he admitted. "It's your affair. I won't interfere."

"Thank you, Richard."

"But you know what I think."

She nodded. He went up to her and looked at her

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steadily. "You're really not well," he said. "And no wonder. I shouldn't have let you stay out all afternoon. You should have supper in bed."

She tried to smile at him. "I'll lie down for a while. I'll be better by dinner-time."

When she was alone again, she began to wonder excitedly about the diary. If Lucy Forbes *was* the "L" of the diary. . . . But perhaps it was silly of her; perhaps she should leave it alone. Then an appalling thought came to her, and her eyes opened wide.

Ten

DINNER was an uneasy meal. To begin with, Stokes was late in appearing. Ada sent up an angry message from the kitchen: the soup was ready, the joint would be overdone. After Sarah had sent Barton upstairs to tell him that they were all waiting, he came down unhurriedly and took his place at the table with scarcely a word of apology.

Ada had laid the table just as usual, and the slightly taller chair at the head, in which Ogilvie used to sit, was left vacant, giving the empty place a disquieting command of the table, and what conversation there was was carried on in low, almost respectful, tones.

Sarah had no appetite; she left her soup untasted and told Barton to give her no meat. Her fingers crumbled the bread on her side plate. She longed to leave the room, but some instinct of duty made her stay until the meal was over.

She noticed that Forbes also ate little and seemed nervous: he was constantly clearing his throat and fiddling with his tie. Stokes was morose and preoccupied; only Baker and Marinney kept up a desultory conversation with some semblance of normality. As soon as the meal was over she excused herself and went straight upstairs to her bedroom.

For a time she sat in the dark, thinking about Henry and the possibilities that his appointment-diary had re-

vealed. *Could* it be possible? The idea no longer either excited or horrified her: it just filled her with an uneasy incredulity. At last she got up wearily, switched on the light and the fire, and crossed to the dressing-table by the window. Pulling open a drawer, she unfastened the string of pearls from her neck and put them away in her jewel-case. Her eye was caught by her own reflection in the glass. But behind that reflection was a stir of movement.

Not wanting to turn round, she leant closer to the glass and saw that the door of the clothes-closet was moving slightly. As she watched, the movement stopped. In the silence she could hear her own heavy breathing and the beat of her heart.

For over a minute she waited. Then, telling herself that it must have been an optical illusion, a trick of the light, she turned round slowly.

A hand, a smallish one, was thrust round the door and clutched its edge. It was grubby. With a jerky movement, she picked up a heavy, empty scent bottle, the only weapon within reach. She did not think of screaming or running away, but stood staring at the hand as though hypnotized by it.

Half a minute later the door was pushed open wider. The hand was followed by a brown woollen sleeve. Stealthily the Barton child emerged.

Crying out with relief, Sarah put down the scent bottle. "What are you doing in my room?" she demanded.

He stood there and looked her up and down very coolly, saying nothing, his expression simply registering her question. It was she and not he who looked nervous.

Hesitantly she took a few steps towards him.

"Don't come any nearer," he warned. Taken aback, she obeyed.

He was tall and big for his age. Standing there in a belligerent attitude, he looked menacing. "Why don't you tell me to get out?" he demanded.

His insolence angered her. "Look here, you'd better explain yourself. What do you mean by coming here?"

"What do you mean by coming here?" He mimicked her voice surprisingly well. "I didn't expect you to find me," he said calmly. "I was playing, that's all."

"This isn't the place to play. What were you doing in my cupboard?"

"Dressing-up." He made as if to turn to the door, but she intercepted him and stood with her back against it.

"Listen to me," she ordered. "I don't mind what you've been up to so much as the way you're behaving now. Are you always rude to people?"

He said nothing, and she added, more mildly: "It's hardly the way to make friends, you know."

"I don't care," he said, almost pressed against her now, trying desperately to get out of the room. "Besides, I don't want to make friends with you. Mum wouldn't like it."

"Why not?"

"Because she hates you, that's why."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"You're the one that's talking nonsense," he retorted. "Mum's always hated you. And I hate you, too. You shouldn't have come here in the first place. We were better off without you."

"Oh? Tell me about it."

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"Why should I? It's none of your business."

"Go on. I'd like you to tell me."

His eyes flickered warily. "Mum doesn't know I'm here."

"Well, what of it?"

"You might have thought she sent me," he mumbled.

She looked down at him. Perversely he scowled, making his face as disagreeable as possible. All the same, he was rather a handsome boy, very like his mother.

"Why should she have?" she asked.

"To make trouble for you, I s'pose."

"You've been burdened with things you shouldn't know about," she answered. "How old are you? Twelve, isn't it?"

Scowling, he demanded: "How old was Ogilvie?"

"That's enough," she said wearily. Moving away, she opened the door for him. "You can go now." But he stayed where he was. In an aggrieved voice he said: "I can talk about him any way I like. I've known him longer than you." He put his head on one side. "He was ages older than you. You hadn't any business marrying him. I know why you did it."

Then she found herself smiling. "Why?" she asked abstractedly, expecting him to say, "For his money."

But he answered: "To make us all miserable." The unhappiness in his face shocked her.

"What ever do you mean?" she asked. "How could my marrying him make *you* miserable?"

"We were happy before you came," he insisted. "We would come upstairs as much as we liked, and there weren't any rows. He used to play games with us sometimes too—with Mum and me on the kitchen table."

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Mostly card games. I always won. You made it all different. He never bothered about us after you came. It was all your fault."

How incredible this picture was! Could such a Henry really have existed?

"Mr. Ogilvie once told me," she said crisply, "that he thought all games were a waste of time."

She left the door open and went to stand in front of the window. Idly she remembered how yesterday evening she had looked out from the drawing-room window. Henry was alive then, and now he was dead. But opposite, the terrace of houses, grim and murky, looked just the same.

"It can't have been the same man," she said to herself.

He came up behind her. "That's what you like to think. But it's you who made him different."

She turned round to him. "Why think of it now? Just try to forget it. You've a father and a mother of your own."

"I can't forget it." He seemed to be on the verge of tears. "And I don't want my father. I hate him. I don't want to grow up like him. I want to be like Mr. Ogilvie. What did you do to turn him against us?"

The scene was too painful to bear. "I can't tell you anything. Go away and leave me alone. I can't help you."

"I can tell you what you did!" he shouted. "I'll tell you. He stayed away for a month. Then one night Mum told me he was coming back with a wife, a stranger. I thought it was terrible; I couldn't go to sleep. But all the next day at school I thought about how when I got home

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I would go upstairs and tell him I didn't mind. And then I was home and Mum was snapping at me and telling me I couldn't see him, he was busy; too busy to see her, either. But I sneaked upstairs all the same, and went into his room. He was sitting on the bed, unpacking. He looked up and stared at me, and I waited for him to smile; but he said, just the same as you said now, 'Go away.' And then he said, 'Don't come here again.' So I ran downstairs." His voice was hoarse now with shouting. "So that's how I know it was you who turned him against us. You told him something, to make him forget us, while you and him were away together." His mouth worked, as he struggled to keep back his tears.

Not knowing what to say or do, she watched him helplessly. The boy suddenly made a curious sound, half-cough, half-groan, and began to sob, in an unnatural, choking way.

"What have you done to my baby?" shrilled Ada Barton, from the doorway. She ran to the child and took him in her arms. "My pet, what has she done to upset you?"

But the boy continued to shake with sobs, unable to answer her. "You've driven him into a convulsion!" she accused Sarah, clutching the boy more tightly to her.

"He had better lie down," said Sarah. "Put him on the bed."

"Don't you give me orders, not when it's to do with my child. You're not the mistress then."

Gradually the child's sobs died down to an occasional hiccough. He turned his head and looked first at his mother, then at Sarah, his face oddly blank. "Are you all

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right, precious?" Ada asked tenderly, smoothing his hair. He nodded, dumbly.

Ada turned angrily to Sarah. "And now may I ask, *Madam*, what you've been doing to him?"

"I've done nothing," replied Sarah calmly. "I found him hiding in my cupboard."

"Why did you come here?" she asked the boy fiercely. "You've been told not to come upstairs. Now see what it got you. Get on downstairs and stay there."

Reluctantly the boy shuffled out of the room, rubbing his tear-stained face. His mother made as if to follow him, but Sarah quickly shut the door. "One minute, Mrs. Barton," she said, "I wish to speak to you."

"Well?"

"I don't like your manner," she said coldly. "In ordinary circumstances I'd give you a month's wages and ask you to leave."

"You would, would you? Well, do you think I care tuppence if I stay or go? I've nothing to stay for, now that *he's* gone."

"I see." Deliberately Sarah went across to the bedside table, took a cigarette from the box and lit it. Inhaling deeply, she tried to control the tremor in her voice as she asked: "Mrs. Barton, I should like to know just what my husband meant to you."

Ada laughed hysterically. "More than he did to you, I'll be bound."

Colouring slightly, Sarah went on in a firmer voice, "Am I to understand that you were his mistress?"

"Mistress, did you say? No, I wasn't his mistress. I was his *wife*—in every way that mattered." She paused, to let her words take effect. "Oh, it was you he married, but

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it was me he loved. I was everything to him, the loveliest woman in the world, the only one he really cared about. Yes, *after* you were married as well."

"In my own house . . ." Sarah murmured, her face deathly-white now.

"No, in *his* house—our house. You never belonged here." The words came to Sarah faintly, an echo of those she had herself spoken that afternoon to Marinney. The realization of their truth was like a bitter taste in her mouth.

Bleakly she asked, "How long has this been going on?"

"Years. Since Howard was a baby. Barton knew—lot he cared."

"But why—why did he marry me?" she cried, bewildered.

"We quarrelled, that's why. He went away and married you to spite me. But it didn't take him long to find out he'd made a mistake. He was back to me in no time, I can tell you."

As if her life with Henry were some monstrous jig-saw puzzle, Sarah saw the missing pieces being inexorably pushed into place. "Oh, what a fool I've been!" she exclaimed, half to herself.

"I'll say," Ada agreed. "We used to say you were like the three wise monkeys—or two of them, anyway," she added spitefully. "You lived in such a dream, didn't you?"

"A dream? It seems to have been a nightmare. As if Henry's death were not enough to bear, without this——"

"You killed him, didn't you?" Ada hissed viciously. "You won't care until they get the rope round your neck."

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Sarah stared at her, her eyes wide in astonishment. "I killed him? Do you really believe that?"

"He asked you for a divorce, didn't he? Wasn't that why you did it?"

"Why should I have killed him for that? What would I have gained?"

"Perhaps you'd found out about me: perhaps all you've been saying now was just a pretence. You're deep, you are. I wouldn't put it past you. You could have done it out of jealousy."

Wearily Sarah turned away. "He should have married you, not me. I was nothing to him. Why should I be jealous? No, Mrs. Barton, I didn't kill him. I don't know who did."

"Is that true?" Ada shrilled. "If you did, you won't get anything out of it—they'll get you all right."

"Yes," Sarah said ironically, "they're trying hard enough." She sat down on the edge of the bed and kicked off her shoes. "Do you want to stay?" she asked dully.

"I don't know—I'll have to see."

"After all this is over—I shall be going away. I expect Henry provided for you."

"Oh, he made a will all right. He would do that, wouldn't he? I mean, he had his head screwed on the right way when it came to business." She said this with complacency.

"In any case, you needn't worry; I'll take care of you all."

Ada drew herself up angrily and said: "No, *thank you!* You're not the only one who's got pride."

"Oh, you wouldn't have to feel under any obligation. I'd do it to satisfy myself."

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Ada sniffed. "I dare say. We'll see about that. After all, this case isn't solved yet."

Drawing the little that was left of her dignity to her, Sarah got up from the bed and said stiffly, "Will you leave me now, please, Mrs. Barton? I wish to go to bed."

Without a word Ada turned on her heel and left the room.

Sarah sank down to the floor as though her knees had given way. Resting her head against the bed, she drifted into thinking neither of herself nor of the woman who had just left her. It was Henry whose face she saw. With a desolate wonder she saw him as he might have once looked in the happy days before he married her. She started to shiver with the emptiness of never having really known him.

Eleven

THE next morning Sarah did not go down to breakfast. When she had not appeared by ten o'clock Marinney suggested to Ada that she should go and see if she was all right. But Ada replied, "Oh, she'll ring soon enough if she wants something," and went on stacking the breakfast things on to a tray.

Eventually Marinney himself knocked at Sarah's door. At first there was no answer; then a faint "Yes?"

"It's me—Richard," he called. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, thank you," she answered, still faintly. "I'll be down later."

"What about breakfast? Shall I get them to bring something up?"

"No, really, thank you, Richard. I'm not hungry." Then she added, "Don't worry."

For several minutes he stood outside the door; then he went quickly downstairs to the drawing-room and paced up and down restlessly. At last he forced himself to sit on the sofa and read the paper.

The house was oddly hushed, after the activity of the previous day. Stokes was presumably up in his office, working; Forbes had gone to his room; and Baker was out. Neither Inspector Harris nor Sergeant Leeds had put in an appearance that morning, although there was still a constable on duty outside.

Folding the newspaper in four, Marinney took out a

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pencil and applied himself to the crossword. A few minutes later there was the sound of someone bounding up the stairs, and the door opened to admit Baker.

"Thank God to find *someone* about," he said, throwing himself into a chair. "This house is like a morgue today."

Marinney looked up sharply. "It's not really surprising, is it?" he said dryly. "In view of what's happened."

"I suppose not. Poor old Henry. Who would have thought it." He got up and went across to the table to help himself to a cigarette from the box. "Where is everyone this morning, anyway? I haven't seen *her* since dinner last night."

"Sarah is resting," Marinney replied, a little stiffly. "I've no doubt she's still suffering from shock. That wretched Inspector gave her a thorough grilling yesterday."

"I bet he did. Do you think she did it?"

"Sarah? Good God, no."

"You sound pretty sure. I didn't know you knew her that well."

"I don't. But I am pretty sure, all the same. Can you see her killing Henry?"

Baker reflected for a moment, drawing on his cigarette. Then he said: "I dare say not, poor girl. Forbes seemed to think she had. Where is he, by the way?"

"Up in his room, so far as I know. I haven't seen him since breakfast."

"He's in a bit of a dither, isn't he? I've never known old Jim so nervous. Oh, well, I suppose it's understandable. I ought to go and dig him out and take him off for a walk, but it's too damn cold out this morning. I didn't bring an overcoat—that's the worst of this climate, you

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never know what it's going to do from one day to the next."

"Anyone about outside?" Marinney asked.

"Oh, the usual crowd—reporters and ghouls. Amazing how they collect, like a lot of vultures. Who do *you* think did it?"

Marinney shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't an idea," he replied shortly.

"I'm inclined to think it was an accident."

"An accident? No, I don't think so. Had you forgotten how precise Henry was? No, I'm sure it wasn't an accident. And so are the police, I believe."

"They would be. Murder's the breath of life to those chaps." He threw his half-smoked cigarette into the fire. "Hell, I don't care if it is cold, I'm going round to the local. Coming?"

Marinney shook his head. "No, thanks. I think I'll persevere with this a bit longer."

"See you later, then." Whistling, Baker ran down the stairs.

When Sarah had finally driven herself to get up and dress, she did not go downstairs; instead she knocked on the door of Forbes's room, in which she had heard movements. Forbes was packing: his neatness was very apparent in the way in which he folded his clothes and wrapped them in tissue paper.

"You're not leaving?" she asked, surprised.

"I—er—think it would be best if I moved to a hotel, Mrs. Ogilvie. After all, in these painful circumstances you can hardly want your house full of strangers."

"That's very considerate of you. But really I should be grateful if you would stay—until after the inquest, at least."

He raised his eyebrows in query. "I assure you it wouldn't be any trouble for me to move——"

"Oh, but I insist," she said. "I would really *rather* you remained——"

"Put like that——" he began, and intuitively she knew that although he wanted to go he was a mean man and was thinking of the expense involved. He smiled nervously. "Well, thank you, then, I will stay on if it's no extra trouble."

She remained standing by the door, while he began to unpack some of his things. When she made no move to go, he asked her hesitantly: "Is there something—something I can do for you?"

"Perhaps. May I come in and shut the door?"

"By all means," he stammered, giving her a pained look. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you." He moved his suitcase from the arm-chair to the bed. "This one is the most comfortable—but of course you know that," he added in some confusion.

"Is it?" she asked detachedly. "Do you know, I don't believe I've ever been in this room before."

There was an awkward silence while she sat staring out of the window at the view of the straggly garden and he half-sat, half-leant on the bed. At last she turned round and said, as spontaneously as she could, "I do wish you'd tell me about my husband. About when he was a boy."

Forbes cleared his throat uneasily. "I didn't really know him very well, I'm afraid, and it was so long ago——"

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He gave a forced laugh. "We've all changed a good deal since then."

"Yes. But you must have some recollections of your school-days. He often talked to me of you," she lied, "and of Mr. Baker and Richard Marinney. You were all friends, weren't you? Your families knew each other, too?"

Nervously he fingered the fringe of the bed-spread. "Not really. My parents lived in the country——"

"But they had a town house?" she asked hopefully.

"No."

"How odd. I thought I remembered Henry telling me about the wonderful parties they gave."

"They used to—to borrow a house in London sometimes."

"I see. Yes, that's what I thought."

Very pale now, he stared at her and asked, "What did Henry tell you?"

"Not a great deal. Just that he went to your parents' parties sometimes. He used to enjoy them."

"I dare say." The bitter lines that she had noticed about his mouth became more pronounced.

"He spoke a bit about your family," she went on. "You have a sister, haven't you?"

"No."

"It was Sarah's turn to stare. "I'm so sorry," she murmured, "I was sure——"

Tensely he said: "I had a sister, Mrs. Ogilvie. She's dead."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she repeated lamely, "I didn't know."

"She was only a girl," he went on, in a strained voice,

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"twenty. It was my last year at school—1931. She died that summer, at the beginning of the holidays. It was a terrible shock. Terrible. I don't think my parents ever got over it." He turned away and began to fuss about with some things on the dressing-table. "No, I'm sorry to have to disappoint you, Mrs. Ogilvie, but I don't think there's much I can tell you about Henry. You see, all that put most of my schooldays out of my mind."

"Yes, of course." Sarah got up, made a tentative move towards him as if to touch his arm, and then went quickly to the door. "You must forgive me," she murmured, "you really must forgive me."

At four that afternoon a scattered group of parents were waiting at the gate outside a Bayswater school. Among them, standing a little apart, was Harris. A bell rang in the building, and a few minutes later a crowd of boys, most of them with dark red blazers, streamed out into the yard. The gateway was narrow; only four or five at a time could come through it. Harris scanned all their faces carefully as they emerged on to the pavement.

Then he came forward and stopped a sullen-faced, dark boy. Howard looked up and recognized the Inspector immediately. He stood staring at him in defiant silence.

"You know who I am, don't you, my boy?" Harris asked.

"Yes," he said defensively.

Harris smiled. "Don't worry, you haven't done anything wrong."

"I know that," the boy replied sullenly.

"All right, son. Look here, there are one or two things

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I want to ask you. Shall we go over there and sit down for a minute?"

They walked to the corner in silence. Opposite was a bleak square, mostly concrete, with one or two trees and a few balding patches of grass. There was a single bench in the middle, and to this Harris steered the boy. Howard sat down and stared straight in front of him glumly.

"Don't be scared," said Harris, hoping to get some reaction out of the boy.

Swiftly the retort came—"I'm never scared."

"Then why do you have a chip on your shoulder? It's a give-away, you know."

"You think you know everything."

"Don't I?"

"No. There's plenty I could tell you."

"Well, why don't you go ahead and tell me?"

"Why should I?"

"I'll make it worth your while."

"How?" The boy's eyes gleamed.

"By turning you over my knee if you don't."

"You don't have any business threatening me like that."

"Look, son, I'm willing to be friendly. Why don't you play along?"

Howard said nothing.

"What's school like?" Harris asked jovially.

"I don't know. Lousy. Mum says I've got to stick it till I'm eighteen."

"She's right."

Howard laughed. "She's got big ideas about me. It's just that she doesn't want me to grow up like *him*."

"Like who? Your Dad?"

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The boy nodded.

"Don't they get on—your Mum and Dad?"

The boy shook his head. "Mind your own business. I'm not telling."

Harris sighed. "All right. You've got nothing to tell. I can see that. I'm wasting my time." He made as if to get up from the bench.

"Don't you be too sure. I know every single thing that goes on in that house."

"Do you, now?" Harris asked disinterestedly.

"Yes, I do. If you want to know, my mother tells me everything. *And* I keep my eyes and ears open, I can tell you."

"Really? I'm surprised your mother talks to you—she'd talk to your father more likely."

"Listen." Howard leant towards him. "She doesn't even sleep in the same room as him any more. She shares my room. See? She sleeps on the divan."

"I suppose the next thing you'll be telling me is that she slept there the night Mr. Ogilvie died."

"He didn't die. He was killed. I'm not a baby. I know what happened."

"Well, if you do, you know more than me," Harris said dryly.

"Yes," the boy went on, "she slept in my room that night." He came closer to Harris, his eyes narrowed. "I'll tell you something. Don't think my mother knows anything about what happened. That's why you're asking me all these questions, I bet. But I was awake that night and I saw her. She only left the room for a couple of minutes. I heard her come back—just before I went to sleep again."

Harris's face was expressionless. "Are you sure it was

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only for a couple of minutes? You might have been dozing in the meantime."

"I wasn't dozing, see? I sat up in bed. I know what I'm talking about. She heard him rattling about in the kitchen. I heard him, too, but I didn't say anything. She went in there. And she came back just a few minutes later. I waited. She came back. And after that, I heard him go out of the kitchen and upstairs. Then I fell asleep. It was Mrs. Ogilvie who killed him. I'm telling you the truth."

"Be quiet," said Harris abstractedly. "I believe what you've told me."

But the boy went on insistently: "It was her, Mrs. Ogilvie, that did it. She knew where the stuff was kept."

"What stuff?"

"That stuff they put in their milk to make them sleep better. I tasted some once. It was disgusting."

"What makes you think Mrs. Ogilvie killed her husband?"

"I know it. She wanted to. She hated Mum——" he broke off.

"Hated your mother? Why should she do that?"

But, as though he realized that he had gone too far, Howard sat with his lips primly together, and refused to say another word.

Harris stood up. "Come along," he said. "I'll take you home now."

"I go home by myself every day."

"Today's your lucky day, then," Harris remarked cheerfully.

"Tell me about fingerprinting," the boy said, suddenly responsive.

Twenty-two Ranelagh Gardens looked half-deserted;

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curtains were drawn across most of the upstairs windows. The boy lifted the latch of the area gate. Swinging it open, he started to run down the passage at the side of the house. Harris followed him.

They stood together outside the back door. Harris knocked. Howard began to wriggle and squirm and look uneasy once more.

Someone was moving about in the kitchen. Whoever it was did not trouble to answer at once. After half a minute footsteps approached the door and it was opened. Ada stood there, smoothing down her apron. Seeing Harris, she seemed taken aback, but she rallied swiftly.

"Come in, please, Inspector," she said. "Why the back door? Howard, why did you bring the Inspector round here?" She smiled archly. "You ought to have more respect for the Law."

"It wasn't his fault, Mrs. Barton. I followed him this way. I met him at his school, and we walked back together."

Her smile fading, she looked down at the boy, who was hopping from one foot to the other. A tense expression clouded her face.

Harris said: "I'd like a word with you, privately." Mechanically, she untied her apron and handed it to the boy. "Put this in the kitchen," she said tonelessly. "Your tea's on the table." Then she led the way down the passage to the dark sitting-room at the front.

"Please sit down, Mrs. Barton," Harris said. She took a chair in the corner, and sat stiffly, her hands folded in her lap. He remained standing. "Now, Mrs. Barton," he said patiently, as though he were asking the question for the first time, "I want your account of what happened after

half past eleven on the night of Mr. Ogilvie's death."

She licked her lips. "You asked me that before."

"I know."

Looking down at the worn carpet, she said: "I've told you."

"The truth? I don't think so. For your own sake, Mrs. Barton, I think you'd better tell the truth now."

Defiantly she said: "Have you asked Mr. Stokes?"

"Mr. Stokes? What is it to do with him?"

"I was with him that night. In his room. I went up there before twelve and didn't come down until after he'd found the body."

"I see. Before twelve, you say?"

"Yes. Why don't you ask him?"

"Because I'd rather have the truth from you," he replied quietly. "Once more, Mrs. Barton, will you tell me what happened on the night of Mr. Ogilvie's death? I'm warning you, this can have serious consequences for you."

"All right, Inspector," she said, in a tightly controlled voice. "And there's no need to stand over me like a watchdog. I'd like to be able to breathe, if it's all the same to you." Anger coarsened her features.

He moved back a little and waited.

"It's like this," she began. "I sometimes spend the night on the divan in my boy's room."

He nodded. "I know that."

"He's highly-strung, you see, and he likes to have me there. I—I went to bed there that night." She hesitated.

"Go on."

"At about twelve I heard a noise in the kitchen. The boy's room is between this one and the kitchen."

"I know that. Go on."

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Her eyes flickered up at his face, as though searching for a hint of what she ought to say next. But his expression was blank. "I knew it must be Mr. Ogilvie, getting his milk. He was making such a devil of a row that I got up and went to see what he was doing. I didn't want him to wake the boy, but it seems"—she gave Harris a shrewd look—"I needn't have bothered."

"And what was Mr. Ogilvie doing?"

"Rummaging about in all the cupboards and drawers looking for his teaspoon. He had a special one, you see, the right size or something. He was always very particular. Of course I found it for him at once."

"And the cupboard in which the sleeping-powder was kept—was he rummaging in that as well?"

"I don't know. I can't remember." She blinked rapidly several times. "Oh, yes, the cupboard was open and he had the packet already out on the dresser. I gave him the milk from the fridge and he poured himself a cup. We talked for a minute or two, and then he went upstairs. I went back to Howard's room."

"Until when?"

"How do you mean 'until when', Inspector?"

"I mean, when did you go upstairs to Mr. Stokes?"

"Oh, *that*," she said carelessly, "that was a bit later—about half-past twelve. Mr. Stokes can tell you I didn't leave him until after he found the body," she added quickly.

"Yes," Harris conceded, "but that isn't going to help you, Mrs. Barton, if I don't choose to believe him. In the time you were talking to Mr. Ogilvie you had all the opportunity you needed to put an extra dose of that powder in his milk."

"But I tell you, I didn't!" she cried, clenching her fists.

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"I didn't! I never went near that cup of milk! You've no business not believing me."

"Why? Because you told me the truth before, when I asked you about that night?"

"No, because——" She broke off. A look of horror came over her face. Her hands lay still in her lap.

"Because you were his mistress?"

She could not deny it; she was unable to say a word. Getting up, she pushed past him and leant, with her back to him, against the mantelpiece, so that he could not see her face.

"This had been going on for some years?" he continued, in an even voice.

She nodded, without speaking.

"And did Mrs. Ogilvie know?"

Ada turned slowly, still leaning against the mantelpiece. "Yes," she said. "She found out."

"When?"

"I don't remember exactly. Let's see. About a month ago. She's hardly spoken to me since."

"How did she find out?"

"Why—he told her. He couldn't bear it any longer. He wanted a divorce."

"To marry you?"

Ada looked surprised at his question: she had not noticed the faint suspicion of sarcasm in his voice. "Why, no, Inspector. I couldn't marry him. I've got my boy to think of. No, just to be free of her."

"And what was her reaction?"

"She refused him. Oh, she was mad at him, I can tell you. Nothing but screamings and rows from morning till night."

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"It's funny," Harris said reflectively, "although I'm sure Mrs. Ogilvie has a sharp side to her tongue"—he smiled ruefully at the recollection of some of his own brushes with Sarah—"I'd have said she was a quiet woman, not given to that sort of thing."

"Naturally she'd be on her best behaviour with you," Ada replied tartly. "She's got an axe to grind, hasn't she?"

"You've certainly got your knife into her, haven't you, Mrs. Barton?"

"Can you wonder—after what she's done?" she spat out.

"Now, now, Mrs. Barton," he said reprovingly, "we're all innocent, you know, until we're proved guilty. That applies to you as much as to anyone, remember," he added.

She did not reply, and he went on: "What did you and Mr. Ogilvie talk of in the kitchen?"

"I was there for hardly a minute."

"But while you *were* there you talked—what about?"

"Oh——" she said vaguely, and thought for a moment, then brightened. "We talked about how hopeless he was in the house. How he never could find anything. That kind of thing we talked about. Nothing serious."

"Did he mention the row he was having with Mrs. Ogilvie?"

She frowned. "Oh, yes. He did just mention it. It was such an old story, after all. 'She's on at me again,' he said. And to think that we spent our last few minutes together in talking nonsense." She covered her face with her hands and turned away.

Harris wandered restlessly about the room, picking up

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first an ugly cut-glass ashtray and then a garish ornament that might have been won at a fair. "Why did you lie to me in the first place?" he shot at her.

"Because if I'd told you one thing I'd have had to tell you all of it. Can't you understand my wanting to keep it to myself?"

"All right. That's all, Mrs. Barton. I'd like to see your husband. Any idea where he is?"

"Having his tea, I expect. In the kitchen."

"Mind if I see him in here? I dare say you'll be wanting your tea, anyway," he added kindly.

Reluctantly she turned and followed him out of the room.

In the kitchen the boy and Barton sat at the table, Barton in his shirt-sleeves. A large brown teapot covered with a knitted cosy was at the head of the table, where Ada's chair had been left vacant for her. At sight of the Inspector, Barton jumped up; the boy went on munching his cake unconcernedly.

"I'd like a word with you, Barton, if you don't mind," Harris said. "Will you just step into the sitting-room a minute?"

Barton looked round anxiously for his coat, found it behind the door and put it on. It was obvious that without it he felt at a disadvantage. Holding the door open for the Inspector, he was once more the upright little man of the previous day's interview.

"Now, Barton," Harris began, when they were alone together in the sitting-room, "I should like to go over the statements you made yesterday about the events of the previous night." He was aware of a certain anxiety in the butler's expression as the words took effect. Turning up

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his notes, he went on, "You say here that at shortly after twelve you heard voices in the kitchen. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir," Barton replied in a near-whisper.

"Those voices belonged to Mr. Ogilvie and his wife. Still correct?"

There was a moment's silence. "That is what you said, isn't it, Barton?"

"Yes, sir."

"But it isn't what you meant? Is that it, Barton?"

Again a silence. "What did you mean, Barton?"

Hesitantly: "I *thought* I heard Mrs. Ogilvie's voice, sir. I might have been mistaken."

"But you did hear voices?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Could one of those voices have been that of your wife?"

No answer.

Impatiently Harris turned on the little man. "Now, look here, Barton, your wife has just told me that she was in the kitchen with Mr. Ogilvie shortly after twelve on the night of his death. What have you to say to that?"

Barton's reaction took him completely by surprise. With a sort of strangled sob the little man crumpled up on the shabby horse-hair sofa. All the stiffening seemed to have gone out of him, and only an inarticulate, gulping sound came from his mouth.

Recovering himself, Harris stood over him and said bracingly: "Come, come, man, it's not so terrible. You can tell me the truth."

Gradually Barton regained his composure, though he remained sitting dejectedly on the sofa. "I don't know what made me do it," he said wearily, "I don't have any-

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thing against her. But it was my Ada I was thinking of—I couldn't tell the truth."

"Of course, it's quite understandable," Harris said briskly. "But the fact is, Barton, the truth generally comes out sooner or later. It's better for all concerned to make it sooner. So, am I to take it that the words you thought you heard in the kitchen that night"—he glanced at his notes—"something about 'getting away and leaving her'—were in fact spoken, not by Mrs. Ogilvie, but by Mrs. Barton?"

After a moment's hesitation, Barton replied in a low voice: "Yes."

"Is there anything you wish to add? Anything else you forgot to tell me yesterday?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you, Barton. I'm sorry to have disturbed your tea."

Quietly Harris left the room and made his way up the stairs to the third floor. Stokes was sitting at his desk, a typewriter in front of him and a mass of papers at his side. When he had called "Come in", he had clearly not expected his visitor to be the Inspector, for he jumped up guiltily and began to fuss round the room, slamming drawers shut and tossing papers from one basket to another. "Do sit down, Inspector," he said, in a languid tone that did not match all his flurry. "There's scarcely room to swing the proverbial cat, but I think we can offer you a chair."

"Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt you in your work. Tidying up, I see?"

"Yes. There's a good deal that must be straightened and sorted before I take my leave."

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"Any plans, Mr. Stokes?"

"No." He might almost have added, "Mind your own business," Harris thought.

"Well, I dare say you'll be sorry to leave. I gather the job here has its compensations."

Stokes coloured slightly. "What are you insinuating, Inspector?"

"I won't beat about the bush, Mr. Stokes. I've just been having a little chat with Mrs. Barton, down in the kitchen. She's told me that on the night of Mr. Ogilvie's death she was up here with you. I'd just like to have your corroboration of that statement."

Defensively Stokes said: "Yes, she was up here. I want you to know, Inspector Harris, that Mrs. Barton and I are very much in love with each other."

"I'm not concerned with your moral conduct, Mr. Stokes," Harris said mildly, "I'm just interested in criminal investigation. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what time Mrs. Barton came up to you that night."

Stokes's hesitation was only momentary. "It was before twelve. Yes, definitely before twelve," he added, with more assurance. "I remember looking at my watch."

"Which keeps good time?"

"Perfect." As if to demonstrate this, he held up his wrist.

"I see," Harris said slowly. "Then if I was to tell you that Mrs. Barton had admitted to me that she was in the kitchen with Mr. Ogilvie *after* twelve on that night, what would you say, Mr. Stokes?"

Stokes was obviously completely taken aback by this question: it was almost as though he had been physically winded. "She—she told you that?" he stammered.

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"Certainly."

Recovering himself a little, he said: "Well, in that case, Inspector, I can only suppose that my watch does *not* keep perfect time. It must have been wrong."

"How wrong, would you say, Mr. Stokes?"

"I—I really don't know."

Casually flicking at a piece of fluff on his trouser-leg, Harris said wearily: "Why don't you tell me the truth? Your watch wasn't wrong, and you know it. What time did Mrs. Barton come up here that night?"

Banging his hand on his desk, Stokes replied with unexpected vehemence: "About one, damn it."

"And stayed until——?"

"After I found the body. She went down before I sent for the doctor."

"The rest of your statement yesterday being true?"

"It was all true!" he shouted. "I didn't lie—I just didn't volunteer anything. And why the hell should I have?"

"Why, indeed," Harris murmured. Getting up, he opened the door. "I won't trouble you any more now, Mr. Stokes. I can take it, then, that you were alone in your bedroom until about one a.m. that night?" Without waiting for an answer he went downstairs. Stokes sat at his desk, staring at the wall. "Oh, my god, what a mess we've made!" he groaned to himself.

Twelve

WHEN Harris returned to the Yard there was a message for him to go and see the Assistant Commissioner immediately. With a weary sigh he hung up his coat and hat. Such a request at this stage could mean only one thing: his superiors wanted to know how the case was going—and he had damn all to tell them.

“Afternoon, Harris,” the Assistant Commissioner said amicably, waving him to a chair and pushing the cigarette box towards him. “Look here, what’s going on in this Ogilvie case? Are we sure it’s murder?”

“Pretty well, sir.”

“Pretty well, eh? Can’t you get any nearer it than that?”

“I’m afraid not, sir. The fact is that Ogilvie’s death *could* have been accidental—an overdose of sleeping-powder causing him to suffocate in bed—but from what we know of him it seems highly unlikely. Also the position of the body would indicate that someone held the pillow—a thin one, as it happens—over his head rather than that he buried his face in it.”

“Hm. I see. Any suspects?”

“They’re all a pack of liars for a start. We’re just beginning to get at what may be the truth from some of them. Wife seemed the obvious candidate at first, but now I’m not so sure.”

“Oh?”

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"They didn't hit it off; but the housekeeper was his mistress—with her husband in the house, too. She was also sleeping with the secretary in her spare time."

"Charming set-up. It's fantastic what you unearth when you start poking about in an apparently respectable household."

"Yes," Harris replied gloomily, "and add to all this the presence of three old school-friends invited to stay for heaven knows what reason, and you have a fine mix-up."

"I see. Well, Harris, don't let the grass grow under your feet, will you?" the Assistant Commissioner said, getting up from his desk. "I must push off now. Got some damned dinner-party tonight."

"Don't let the grass grow under your feet," Harris muttered to himself as he returned to his room. Switching on the desk lamp he settled himself in his chair and began to work over his notes. Outside a mournful evening had set in; the buildings opposite were misty with light rain.

A knock at the door heralded the entrance of Sergeant Leeds, who had spent the afternoon going through some of Ogilvie's personal papers. He came in eagerly, a small leather-bound book in his hand, one finger marking his place.

"Thought I saw your light on, Inspector," he began. "Any chips?"

"Not much." Harris could tell that Leeds was bursting to show him *his* find. "What have you got there—a suicide note?"

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"That would be a lark, wouldn't it? No, just a little thing here in this diary of Ogilvie's that may interest you. Listen to this: 'Walking in St. James's Park on way back from lunch met Baker. Very affable. Extraordinary after all these years.' The date was August 6th."

"Let's see." Harris reached up for the book.

"Wait a moment. There's more. Down here at the bottom, where it says 'Memo', it reads: 'Why not invite Baker, Forbes and Marinney to stay? Old chums' reunion!' Take a look." He laid the open book down on the desk in front of Harris. "Funny Baker didn't think to mention that meeting, isn't it?"

"Very funny. It could have slipped his mind, I suppose, but after twenty-five years—you'd have thought he would have remembered. It makes more sense of that invitation, at any rate. It's a bit fishy otherwise that those three should have been invited out of the blue and been there the night he died."

"Any chance of some funny business between Mrs. O. and one of the boys? She was out with Marinney all yesterday afternoon."

"It's not impossible. But I'm not so taken with the idea of Mrs. Ogilvie as her husband's murderer now, Leeds. She *wasn't* down in the kitchen with him that night."

Leeds whistled. "How come?"

"As I've often told you, you can learn a lot from children. Mostly they don't have any inhibitions about the truth. That kid of the Bartons is certainly a pretty rum specimen, but he came clean in the end. No, it was his mother who was in there with Ogilvie—and her husband knew it, too. They both owned up."

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"So she might have put the stuff in his milk?"

"Indeed she might. Although she was his mistress."

"Ogilvie's mistress?"

"Yes."

"That takes some beating, I must say. Though she's certainly a dish. How did you find that out, Inspector?"

"It wasn't very difficult. She told me."

"Giving her husband a motive, wasn't she?"

"Yes, Barton's not in the clear by any means, either. We have only his word for it that he was in bed. Of course Mrs. Ogilvie could have taken some of the powder from the packet previously and put it in his milk upstairs in the drawing-room—she would have had access to his keys. Barton would, too, I suppose, and Mrs. Barton, if it comes to that; Stokes also, possibly. The others? No, I don't think so. So you see, Leeds, there seems to be a whole crop of motives and opportunities springing up. It's a damned awkward business."

He walked over to the window and drummed his fingers on the rain-streaked pane. Buses were swishing along Whitehall and hundreds of ant-like figures, most of them without umbrellas, since the day had been fine, scurried to catch them home. Turning round, he went on: "The fact is, whoever killed Ogilvie would have had to have two opportunities: one to put that stuff in the milk, and one to suffocate him."

Sitting down at his desk again he took a sheet of paper and divided it into two columns. Leeds stood behind him and looked over his shoulder as he wrote:

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	Opportunity 1	Opportunity 2
Mrs. Ogilvie	Could have taken powder earlier and put it in milk after O. brought it up to drawing-room	Could have gone to O's bedroom after he was asleep
Mrs. Barton	Was in kitchen with O. Could also have taken powder earlier	Returned to son's room after seeing O; went up to Stokes at about 1 a.m.
Stokes	Could have taken powder previously (?) and might have gone down to drawing-room after Mrs. O. left it	Was alone until joined by Mrs. B. at 1 a.m.
Barton	Could have gone into kitchen (?). Could have taken powder previously	Was alone in his bedroom. Could have gone upstairs
Marinney	Unlikely to have had access to powder	Could have gone to O's bedroom
Baker	Unlikely to have had access to powder	Was with Forbes at crucial time
Forbes	Unlikely to have had access to powder	See above

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"What's all this about Mrs. Barton and Stokes?" Leeds asked, as soon as Harris had finished writing.

"Just a little bit of homework. Shows you how the other half lives."

"Crikey! No wonder there was murder in the house."

"Yes, as the Assistant Commissioner said, 'a charming set-up'. So there we have it: suspicion falling most strongly on the home team. Unless Baker and Forbes are covering up for each other. Anyway, Leeds"—Harris began to collect his papers together—"I'm off. I'll call in and see friend Baker on the way home, and get his account of that meeting. I'm grateful to you for turning it up."

At Ranelagh Gardens an apprehensive Barton opened the door to him and showed him into the breakfast-room. Here, in a few moments, he was joined by Baker, as debonair and assured as ever.

"Well, Inspector," he began, "to what do I owe this pleasure?"

"I won't keep you long, Mr. Baker. There's just one question I should like to ask."

"Fire ahead. I'll do my best to answer."

"When I saw you yesterday you said that until you arrived in this house on Monday you had not seen Mr. Ogilvie for a great number of years. Is that correct?"

"Why yes, Inspector," Baker replied composedly. "What's the trouble?"

"No trouble at all, sir. Just that according to Mr. Ogilvie's diary he met you in St. James's Park some time in August."

If Baker was at all put out, he did not show it. Slapping

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his leg with his hand, he exclaimed: "How stupid! It completely slipped my mind. We did meet in the Park one day."

"Might I ask, Mr. Baker, if the idea of you and Mr. Forbes and Mr. Marinney coming to stay was mentioned then?"

"No, Inspector, I'm positive it wasn't. We had a very brief conversation; I was on my way to an appointment. But now that you come to mention it, it's pretty obvious that our meeting like that must have put the idea into Ogilvie's head. I mean, it does make it all seem more plausible, don't you think?"

"There's certainly that way of looking at it. I must say, sir, I find it a little strange that it hadn't occurred to you before."

"Yes, it is strange, isn't it?" Baker readily agreed. "But I've got a shocking memory. Never can remember a thing. I'm glad you reminded me, Inspector; it's been bothering me, I don't mind telling you." He smiled disarmingly as they both went out into the hall.

Thirteen

PROMPTLY at ten o'clock the next morning Inspector Harris presented himself at Sir Clement Fraser's consulting rooms in Wimpole Street. The door was opened to him by the same efficient young woman to whom he had spoken on the telephone; as she ushered him down the corridor she said firmly: "Now you won't keep him long, will you? We've a busy morning ahead of us." For once awed by someone else's professional manner, Harris promised to be out in no time at all.

Sir Clement was an elderly man with a ruddy complexion, a thatch of thick white hair and a pince-nez. It was, however, with the agility of a boy that he sprang up from his seat behind the enormous, leather-covered desk and bounded across the room to shake Harris by the hand. Leading him to a comfortable chair as if he were a patient in delicate health, he asked him to sit down.

"I dare say you know why I've called, Sir Clement," Harris began.

"Ogilvie? Yes, I know. A bad business. I can't understand how it could have happened: he was a man of almost pathological meticulousness."

"So I've been told. That fact—and various other aspects of the case—leads us to believe his death was not accidental."

Sir Clement's bristling white eyebrows shot up in sur-

prise. "Suicide? Surely not. Most emphatically not the suicidal type."

"Murder."

The pince-nez fell off and dangled for a moment from Sir Clement's neck. Replacing it, he murmured: "Astonishing. Most astonishing. But who—no, Inspector, it's not for me to ask questions. You are here to ask me them. Proceed, I beg of you."

"Thank you, Sir Clement," Harris said, relieved. Turning up his notebook, he began formally: "Mr. Ogilvie had been your patient for some time?"

"A few years. Four or five, I believe. Would you like me to tell you exactly?" He was ready to bound from his chair again, but Harris answered quickly: "Oh, no, a rough idea is all I want. Was his health generally good?"

"Excellent. He had a very good physique. But he was something of a worrier, and lately he'd not been sleeping well. Too much work, you know, and getting over-tired. He came to me about six months ago and I put him on to somnium. It's pretty harmless, as these drugs go, and has no after-effects. He took it regularly for a few weeks, and then began using it only on occasion, when he'd had a hard day."

"The dose you prescribed was a teaspoonful, Sir Clement?"

"That is correct. A slightly larger dose would be quite safe, however. It would take five or six teaspoonfuls to be lethal. I imagine Ogilvie had taken perhaps three? That would produce a very heavy sleep."

"Yes, I should say so. I understand from Mrs. Ogilvie that it was on your advice that he kept the powder locked up in the kitchen. Is that right?"

Walking briskly, Harris soon came to a telephone box from where he put a call through to the Yard. Leeds was able to give him the name of the chemist who had made up the prescription for the packet of somnium that was in their possession, and not long afterwards the Inspector found himself in a rather dark shop in Kensington, facing a bright young man behind the counter. A quick look in the register told him that Ogilvie had had a packet of somnium dispensed on Monday. Moreover, the bright young man was able to tell him that Ogilvie had brought the prescription in himself in the morning, and had had the sleeping-powder delivered to him after lunch, together with some after-shave lotion, a bottle of fruit-salts and two toothbrushes. In fact he had taken the parcel round himself: they had no regular delivery service, but Mr. Ogilvie was an old customer. He had handed it in to the butler.

Thanking him for his assistance, Harris went on to Ranelagh Gardens, where he had asked Leeds to meet him. Barton opened the door to him, still looking a little apprehensive. Yes, he had taken in a parcel from the chemist on Monday; it was addressed to Mr. Ogilvie and he had given it to him immediately in the drawing-room, where coffee was being served. No, he had not seen Mr. Ogilvie open it.

A second, more systematic, search of Ogilvie's rooms revealed an unopened bottle of fruit-salts and two obviously new toothbrushes in his bathroom; on the dressing-table there were two bottles of after-shave lotion, one nearly empty, the other full. But of the packet of somnium there was no trace.

After examining the kitchen and the other bathroom,

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Harris returned to Ogilvie's study. "Well, Leeds," he said gloomily, "so much for our schedule of opportunities. If it was this packet of somnium that was used any one of them might have pinched it. Take a couple of men and search the house. You won't find it, of course; whoever had it has undoubtedly got rid of it by now. But have a good look, anyway. In the meantime I'll have the whole lot of them down in the drawing-room. Just ask them all to step along there, will you?"

While Leeds and the two constables got to work on their rooms, an uneasy group of people had assembled in the drawing-room. No one spoke. Barton stood deferentially apart, by the door, but Ada settled herself firmly in an arm-chair.

Upstairs in Ogilvie's study, Harris waited long enough for his audience to become thoroughly keyed-up and restive. Then he came down quietly and startled them all by an unexpected entry. He was aware of the tension in the room; "This is where they begin to crack—I hope," he said to himself, as he took up his position by the fireplace.

Smoothly he began: "I'm sorry to trouble you all again, but this morning new light has been shed on the matter of Mr. Ogilvie's death. Up till now we have assumed that the over-dose of sleeping-draught that he took came from a packet locked in the kitchen. We now know that a second packet was in the house at the time he died." He paused and looked carefully round the room at the strained faces of his listeners. One or two of them expressed surprise—Ada's in particular—but Sarah Ogilvie's continued to have the look of blank shock that he had noticed when he had first come into the room.

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Harris turned to address her directly. "Mrs. Ogilvie, do you recollect a parcel being given to your husband in this room after lunch on Monday?" She did not reply, and he went on insistently, as though trying to rouse her out of some kind of trance, "A parcel, Mrs. Ogilvie. A brown paper parcel. After lunch on Monday. You were having coffee in this room and Barton gave it to your husband."

Slowly the words seemed to sink in. "Yes," she replied, a little faintly, "there was a parcel. You brought it in, didn't you, Barton?" The butler took a tentative step or two forward, and nodded eagerly.

"I want you to think back, Mrs. Ogilvie," Harris continued. "Did your husband open that parcel in here?"

"No. No, I'm sure he didn't. We were having coffee at the time."

"Do you recall what he did with it?"

"Not really. But he must have taken it upstairs with him later. He didn't leave it here."

"Did he refer to it in any way?"

"No. Not as far as I can remember."

"Did you know what was in it?"

"No. I didn't ask. I think I knew it was from the chemist. Perhaps Barton said so."

From his corner Barton said: "Yes, I did, sir."

Harris nodded to him in acknowledgment. "Thank you, Mrs. Ogilvie." He turned away from her and addressed the others. "Did anyone else see that parcel? You, Mrs. Barton? Mr. Marinney? Mr. Stokes? No?" They all shook their heads. "Did any of you go into Mr. Ogilvie's bedroom on Monday afternoon or evening?"

"I went in, Inspector," Ada said placidly. "To turn down the bed and draw the curtains."

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"What time would that have been?"

"Before dinner. About six."

"And did you notice either a parcel or a new packet of somnium in the room?"

"No, Inspector. But there was a piece of brown paper in Mr. Ogilvie's waste-paper basket on Tuesday. It had the sealing-wax on, you know, and the chemist's label."

"Anything else in the basket?"

"Two old toothbrushes. I guessed he'd been buying some new ones."

"Quite right. Perhaps you saw them in the bathroom?"

"Come to think of it, I did. But not till yesterday. I didn't feel up to doing the bathroom on Tuesday," she added in an aggrieved voice.

"Who else uses that bathroom, Mrs. Ogilvie? The one between your room and your husband's?"

"Only myself," Sarah replied softly. "The other bathroom is used by Mr. Stokes and our guests."

"Did you at any time notice a new packet of somnium? In the bathroom? In your husband's room?"

"No, Inspector. I wasn't in my husband's bedroom at all that day."

"And the rest of you—did any of you notice that packet?" Once again they all shook their heads. "Just a moment," Harris said. He strode out of the room and in a few minutes returned with a small parcel, which he unwrapped carefully at the bureau. Then he held the contents up for them all to see. "A packet like this?"

There was a moment's silence, during which Baker took out his cigarette case and Forbes fiddled with his tie. Sarah and Ada both looked oddly disinterested. Marin-

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ney's face was puzzled, as though he were trying hard to remember something. It was he who eventually broke the silence. "Hold on, Inspector. Yes—now that I see it I do remember. I noticed it in the bathroom cupboard."

"Which bathroom, Mr. Marinney? Mr. Ogilvie's?"

"Naturally not. The other bathroom."

Harris looked surprised. "The other bathroom? At what time would that have been?"

"Let me see. I know—it was when I was going to bed. I wanted some Elastoplast—I'd cut my finger earlier, and it was annoying me—so on the off-chance I looked in the bathroom cupboard. There wasn't any Elastoplast, but I do remember seeing that blue packet."

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Marinney?"

"Perfectly. It's rather a distinctive colour, isn't it?"

"Yes," Harris agreed. "You didn't examine it? See what it was?"

"No, Inspector. I'm afraid I'm a very poor witness, since curiosity is not one of my vices. I just noticed it was there."

"Had it been opened, would you know that?"

Marinney smiled. "Sorry, Inspector. I can't help you there either."

"Did anyone else see this packet in the bathroom cupboard? Mr. Baker?"

Baker shook his head. "I didn't go to the cupboard at all." He laughed and added, "I always bring my own first-aid when I'm asked to stay."

"Mr. Stokes?"

"I'm sorry, Inspector. As a matter of fact, at the risk of ruining my reputation I must confess I didn't use the bathroom that night. I was so dog-tired I just turned in."

He spoke nervously, and Ada looked up and turned her eyes on him for a few seconds, then looked away.

"Mr. Forbes?" Harris asked. Forbes looked startled, but he stammered: "No. Definitely no. I've never seen it."

"I see." Harris sighed wearily. "Well, I'm afraid I'll have to get all your rooms searched. While that's being done, I must ask you to remain in here. I need hardly tell you that there is no packet of somnium in the bathroom cupboard now."

At this point Sarah flopped forward on the sofa in a dead faint. The reality of murder, which in the past few days she had refused fully to accept, had suddenly forced itself inescapably on her. Marinney caught her as she fell and Harris ran to his side to help him to lay her down on the sofa. She revived quickly, but in the confusion that her fainting had caused, the tension in the room, from which Harris had hoped to learn so much, was somehow broken. In a few moments everyone was talking hysterically as Baker, at Sarah's request, poured out drinks.

Fourteen

AT about five that afternoon someone knocked at Sarah's door. Thinking it might be Marinney, she went across eagerly to open it. But the person standing in the passage was Baker. 4

He looked upset. "Can you spare me a few minutes?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. Is anything wrong?"

Without answering her question, he led the way along the corridor to his room. Standing back from the doorway, he let her go in before him.

She gasped when she saw the state the room was in. Drawers had been flung open, and one had been taken out and thrown on the bed. Clothes littered the floor; the writing-table was covered with scattered papers.

"I've just come in and found it like this," he said. His face was flushed, and his eyes were blinking nervously; all his assured manner had gone.

"But how extraordinary!" she said. "Has anything been stolen?"

"No, nothing," he replied. "I've made sure of that. No, it wasn't a thief. I'd left some money in the top drawer—it's still there."

"Who then?" she asked, her face puzzled.

He looked calmer now. "I don't know. I'm sorry to have been so dramatic. It was just the shock of coming in and finding all this mess."

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"Could it have been the police?"

"I hardly think so. They were here this morning, after all, and left everything exactly as it was."

"But who else? The house is always kept properly locked. It's a thing that Henry—that we're careful about."

"Someone was looking for something, it seems," he said grimly. "But they searched the wrong room. They didn't find what they wanted here. I hope it won't be anyone else's turn next."

Sarah looked bewildered and unhappy. "We'd better get on to the police."

"I suppose so," he agreed half-heartedly, idly tidying the contents of a drawer.

"Shall I ring Inspector Harris?"

"No, don't bother. I'll do it. This must be upsetting for you, too. I thought I'd better tell you, though."

"Of course."

He stopped what he was doing and looked up at her. "You'd rather I dropped it, wouldn't you?" he said slowly.

"Don't think about me. You ought to tell the Inspector."

"It's not important. After all, nothing's missing. I dare say I was making an unnecessary fuss. You've had enough trouble, without the police making a lot more over this."

"Yes, it's true," she admitted. "All those questions——"

"Then we'll both forget it."

Their eyes met; she nodded slowly.

Big Ben was striking six. Feeling somewhat dispirited, Harris was thinking of going home. Then his telephone

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rang. "There's a Mr. Forbes to see you, Inspector," the Sergeant on duty downstairs told him. "Says it's urgent."

"Forbes? Send him up at once." Impatiently Harris waited by the door.

Forbes looked, if it were possible, paler and more nervous than ever. He refused the chair which Harris offered him, and paced restlessly about the room. "I really hardly know how to begin," he said, when the Inspector asked him what had brought him to the Yard.

At last, after clearing his throat once or twice, and wiping the palms of his hands on his handkerchief, he stammered out: "I've been most extraordinarily foolish, Inspector. I can't think what possessed me."

"Something you—er—omitted to tell me?" Harris prompted tactfully.

"Well—yes. Yes, it is something of that sort." There was a silence. Then he burst out, "That packet of somnium—I had it."

"*Had* it, Mr. Forbes? Where is it now?"

"I destroyed it. Poured the powder down the lavatory and then tore up the packet and put that down, too. I see now it was a silly thing to have done." The handkerchief came out again, and he passed it across the back of his neck.

"Very silly, Mr. Forbes. May I ask why you did such a thing?"

Forbes moistened his lips with his tongue. "I was—stupidly—scared. I heard what had happened to Ogilvie and I felt I ought to get rid of the somnium." He looked exceedingly foolish and uncomfortable as he spoke.

"*Won't* you sit down, Mr. Forbes?" Harris asked. The way in which the other man kept wandering about the

room was making him nervous, too. Forbes sank weakly into the chair which he pushed forward.

"That's better. Now, perhaps you'll tell me how that sleeping-powder came into your possession in the first place?"

"He—Ogilvie, I mean—gave it to me. That first night. We were coming up from dinner. Marinney and Baker had gone on. I told Ogilvie I had hardly slept the night before and asked him to forgive me if I turned in early. He said I ought to try this wretched somnium stuff—it had been prescribed by his doctor, Sir Somebody-Something. He offered to let me have some. He said he kept it in the kitchen. Then he remembered he'd just got a new packet, and he insisted on going to his bedroom and fetching it to give to me."

"I see. Did he say anything else about the powder?"

"He told me I'd better put it in the bathroom cupboard—out of harm's way, he said. Oh, yes, I asked him how to take it, and he said *he* always took it in hot milk, in the drawing-room, and I could join him there later to have some. But I told him I didn't care for milk—I never have—so he said I could take it in water."

"Where did this conversation take place?"

"On the stairs, mainly. And outside his bedroom. I waited on the landing while he went to get the packet."

"You were alone with Mr. Ogilvie all the time?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where were the others, do you know?"

"In the drawing-room, I suppose. The door was shut."

"And when Mr. Ogilvie handed you the packet, what did you do with it?"

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"I took it to the bathroom and put it in the cupboard, as he suggested."

"And went along to the drawing-room?"

"Yes."

"Where you found the rest of the party?"

"Yes."

"When you went to bed you took a dose of the medicine?"

"No," Forbes replied a little stiffly. "To tell you the truth I don't really approve of these drugs. But later, when that gramophone kept me awake, I was so desperate that I felt I must take some. I went along to the bathroom—it was about two—and had a dose. After that I fell asleep."

Eagerly, Harris leant forward and asked: "The packet had been opened?"

"Yes. Ogilvie opened it when he gave it to me. I saw him do it."

Harris could barely conceal his disappointment at Forbes's reply. "Oh," he said flatly. Then hopefully he added, "Had any of the powder been taken already, would you say?"

"I don't know. It was the middle of the night, and I haven't any idea how full it should have been. No, Inspector, I really couldn't say."

"Why did you destroy the packet?" He spoke angrily now, and looked hard at Forbes, who shrank away from his gaze.

Nervously he answered: "I've told you, Inspector. I panicked."

"When you learnt that we suspected Mr. Ogilvie had been murdered?"

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"No. Before."

"Before? How long before?"

"After—after the doctor had been. When Stokes called us. I went straight to the bathroom and—and did what I've told you I did."

"Are you telling me, Mr. Forbes, that you destroyed an apparently innocent packet of somnium just because the doctor said Mr. Ogilvie had taken an overdose? Doesn't that seem rather far-fetched to you?"

Forbes ran his tongue several times over his lips; a nerve in his cheek was twitching. "Doesn't it, Mr. Forbes?" Harris repeated.

"I—er—suppose so. But I panicked. I know it was foolish."

"Foolish is not quite the word I would use," Harris said grimly. "However—you destroyed the packet. Had you perhaps some idea that Mr. Ogilvie might have been murdered?"

"I—er—don't know. I don't know what I thought. I just knew it was a pity I had the somnium. I wanted to keep out of the whole thing."

"I see. You must admit it's a pretty incriminating story."

With sudden spirit, the other man replied: "Would I be telling it to you if *I* had murdered him?"

"Perhaps not," Harris said calmly, "and then again perhaps you might."

"If you think that, Inspector," Forbes said with some heat, "you're wrong. Don't worry, I'll prove it to you. Not now—perhaps tomorrow."

Afterwards Harris was wryly to remember his words.

Fifteen

THERE was a violent storm that night. The noise of the wind and the rain woke Sarah from a fitful sleep some time after two. After that she couldn't get to sleep again, but lay awake listening to every sound, as the storm slackened and increased from time to time.

Repeatedly she heard an odd knocking noise. Straining to listen, she decided that a casement in the house had blown open and was swinging back and forth against its frame. She tried to ignore the sound, but it became an obsession. Eventually she got out of bed, put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and went into the passage.

It was difficult to tell where the noise was coming from. The whole house seemed to reverberate with the lashing of the storm. Lights flickered through the landing window to fill the well of the staircase. Sarah shivered with cold and nerves.

Quietly she padded downstairs and made her way to the drawing-room. With the curtains still drawn it was completely dark. Her hand felt for a light-switch: the one it encountered turned on the small lamp on the bureau. In the soft glow it gave to the room she moved cautiously towards the windows. They were all shut.

Suddenly she thought she heard a sound near the fireplace. Not daring to turn round, she called out, as steadily as she could: "Who is it?" There was no answer. She waited, immobile with fear. Then she drew the heavy

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curtains apart and let the street-lamps shine towards the fireplace. Turning round, she saw that there was no one there.

Feeling a little foolish, she left the drawing-room and went to listen on the landing. Now she was sure that the open window was upstairs in Henry's bedroom. The banging had begun again and was clearly coming from there.

As she went up, she heard a faint sound behind her again, as though someone were following her. Turning swiftly, she thought she saw the shadow of a figure moving out of sight round the drawing-room door. Telling herself that it was only her over-wrought imagination, she went on upstairs and opened the door of Henry's room. A blast of cold air struck her in the face and slammed the door shut behind her. She stood still for a moment, trying to calm her nerves.

Two of the windows were open. Reaching out, with the rain blowing in on her face, she pulled the first one shut and locked it. Then she leant out for the other, which was swinging wide in the wind.

At that moment, as she was leaning out, she felt a touch on her arm. She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came. Instinctively she drew herself back from the window and found herself in someone's arms.

"I'm sorry, Sarah," said Marinney. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I thought it might startle you more if I spoke to you first."

Shivering, she pushed him away from her.

"I'm sorry, Sarah," he repeated.

"Have you been following me around?" she asked.

"No. I only came down just now. I'd been lying awake hearing these damned windows."

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"I see." A little warmth had crept back into her voice.

"Only you got here first," he continued. "You were leaning out so far, I was afraid you might fall. That's why I went across to you."

"I'm sorry to have jumped so. My nerves are in a shocking state. I had an idea that someone was following me."

He was silent for a moment. When he spoke, his tone was serious. "You ought to be more careful, Sarah. Don't go wandering about the house at night."

She laughed a little hysterically. "Don't worry. I shan't again."

"Isn't there a man on duty here? He doesn't seem to be around."

"I'm all right now," she said. Leaning out, she pulled the casement to and shut it. "It's sweet of you to worry about me. I'll go back to bed now."

He watched her go down the passage to her room. When the door had shut behind her, he did not go up to his own room at once. Instead he waited for a minute or two, then went quietly downstairs to the drawing-room.

As usual, Barton was the first to be awake in the morning. He had hardly slept. Passing the open door of Howard's room on his way to the bathroom, he looked at the two sleeping forms with envy and distaste. When he shaved his hand shook and a thin trickle of blood ran down on to his chin from a cut below one ear. Then in the mirror he suddenly saw Ada, her heavy hair tousled and her eyes still swollen with sleep. With a clatter he dropped his razor into the basin.

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"You're a clumsy devil," she said, yawning. "Mind you don't crack that basin."

Deliberately he turned on her. "Why don't you shut up."

Her jaws were halted in a yawn as she looked at him in surprise. "What did you say?"

He continued shaving, with short, angry strokes. "You heard."

"What's bitten you?" She sat down on the edge of the bath, pretending to be unconcerned.

"Things are going to be different around here from now on."

"Fancy that," she said sarcastically.

"You can fancy it or not as you like," he said, wiping the lather from his face. "I've had about as much as I can stomach of your carrying on. And it's going to stop, I can tell you. From today."

Standing up to face him, she said threateningly: "Look here, you, I don't have to stay in this house to be insulted."

"Don't you?" He slipped on his jacket, and went towards the door.

"Just a minute. I want an explanation of all this, do you hear me?"

"There's nothing to explain. I've had enough, that's all."

"You've never spoken to me like this before. Something's happened." She made a jeering face. "Don't tell me old Barton's gone and got himself a girl-friend."

At seven-thirty they were having breakfast in the

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kitchen. "What's the matter with Howard?" asked Barton. The boy was unusually silent.

"Nothing you can help," replied Ada, roused for a moment from her own apathy.

"One day," said Barton, laying down his knife and fork, "I'll get to the end of my tether with you."

"Is that a threat or a promise?"

"You just wait."

"Oh, come off it," she said wearily. "The boy's not been himself since she went for him that day."

"I don't believe she did," he retorted. "It's not like her to go for anyone—leave alone a child."

"You're daft. I suppose you never heard her go for *him*. I suppose you thought the shouting was a gramophone record or the wireless."

"He wasn't a saint. He started those rows."

"He wasn't a saint!" She reddened with anger. "Well, maybe he wasn't, but it's not for a good-for-nothing like you to say a word against him!"

"Anyway she wasn't the only one to quarrel with him: I've heard you and him at it often enough."

"That's a damned lie! Don't say such a thing in front of the boy."

"Why not? You say worse." He pushed back from the table and stood up. Even so, he was hardly a commanding figure. "You ought to stop pretending, you poor fool. He was just as tired of you as of everything else. You know he was. I've heard the way he talked to you lately—when he thought he was alone with you. Don't look at me like that. You're not the only one who overhears things."

"Are you proud of it, you old devil?" she hissed, in a

kind of fierce whisper. There were tears of rage in her eyes. "You can think what you like. If we quarrelled it didn't mean anything. He always came back to me in the end."

"That's not true. Why should he? What did you have to give?"

"Howard," she screamed, "don't sit there and let him talk to me like this!"

"You keep out of this, Howard," Barton warned, with his new-found authority. The boy obeyed. "Look, Ada, I'm trying to help you. You've got to learn to forget him."

"Forget him? Who else is there for me? You?" She spat out the last word contemptuously.

"You're a proper bitch," he said, banging his fist on the table. "What have you to give? You used to be pretty, but you're past it now."

"Past it, am I? At my age?"

"Don't try that stuff with me. I know how old you are."

"So what. I'm still younger than some of your precious film-stars. Anyway it wasn't only my looks that he liked. He liked *me*, and he thought me clever."

"I'm sure."

"I'm sure," she mimicked. "You say he was tired of me because you're jealous. Because you're just an ignorant, ugly little man. Well, I'm tired of you. Tired of living with you. I want a divorce. Howard hates you, too. We'll get out of here and leave you with *her*."

"Don't try that."

"He's jealous," she said to the boy. "He's jealous because he knows I've never cared a rap for him."

Barton trembled. "Don't say that," he muttered. "You ought to be ashamed of putting a child against his own father like that."

"I don't have to put him against you," she taunted. "He knows what you're like."

"Shut up, you bitch. Can't you see I've had enough?"

She laughed cruelly. "Had enough? You've had nothing. That's just it, you miserable old man."

"I'm through with lying for your sake," he shouted. "I'm going to get hold of the Inspector. That'll cook your goose. I'll telephone him. I'll go to Scotland Yard myself!"

"Be sure you find the servants' entrance there," she mocked him, as she threw down her apron and went to dress.

After stoking the boiler he returned to the kitchen to make the early morning tea. He glanced at the clock: he was late today. Loading the things on to a tray, he hurried upstairs.

The first door on the second-floor was Forbes's. He knocked, and went in.

Blinking in the semi-darkness, he was aware of something odd about the room. It was the silence. Forbes always breathed heavily in his sleep, but now there was no sound.

Barton approached the bed with his tray. The eider-down was oddly marked. Peering closer, he saw that the marks were rivulets of blood. The handle of the knife seemed to quiver in the dimness. The knife with which Forbes had been stabbed through the heart in his sleep.

Sixteen

FORBES had been stabbed expertly with a sharp, stiletto-like paper-knife that was kept in the bureau in the drawing-room. He had died some time between two and three in the morning. Remembering the dead man's words to him in his office at the Yard the afternoon before, Harris cursed himself for not having foreseen the possibilities of a second murder: it was obvious that Forbes had had to be silenced.

Questioned first, Sarah, who was in a state bordering on collapse, told him of her search to find the banging window, and admitted uneasily to her meeting with Marinney during the night; but she could not bring herself to mention the sensation she had had of being followed. She told herself that it was simply that she did not want the Inspector to think her a hysterical fool, but in her heart she knew that this was not her real reason. Twisting and turning on her bed, she tried to get away from the suspicion that gnawed at her mind. But in its place there came only the remembrance of how she had persuaded Forbes to stay—because she wanted the chance to find out for herself if he could be her husband's murderer.

As Harris expected, no one could tell him anything about the knife. The guests had never seen it before; Sarah did not remember missing it from the bureau, which she had not opened recently. Only Marinney had been up during the night: his story corroborated Sarah's. Baker

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had slept through the storm, as had Stokes; the Bartons had both heard it, but had stayed in bed.

In the grate in Forbes's room Harris found the remains of a fire—very small remains, hardly more than a handful of ashes. Forbes had apparently been burning some papers shortly before his death. Collecting the ashes carefully, Harris had taken them to the laboratory. In the meantime he put Leeds on to getting together a dossier on the dead man.

By midday he had a reconstructed photograph. The original had evidently also been a photograph. It was a portrait of a girl bearing a certain resemblance to Forbes himself. The photograph dated from the 'twenties, judging by the girl's hair-style and collar.

Baker, shown the picture, at once confirmed Harris's supposition: the girl was Forbes's sister, who had died young.

Why, after all these years, after probably carrying the photograph around since the girl's death, should Forbes have chosen—on the day that turned out to be his last—to burn it? Could his murderer have burnt it? He dismissed this idea immediately. The murderer, whoever he or she was, was far too clever to have left the ashes in the grate.

Shelving the problem temporarily, he turned his attention to the dossier on Forbes which Leeds had just brought in. It was detailed and thorough. He read quickly through it, picking out the salient facts.

James Forbes was forty-five when he died. He was a bachelor, had never been engaged to be married, and apparently never romantically involved with a woman. On his parents' death fifteen years before, within months

of each other, he had succeeded to the managing directorship of the family firm of chartered surveyors. The firm was a prosperous and well-known one in Berkshire, and Forbes had been comfortably off. He didn't seem exactly a popular man in his home-town, but then he was not a sociable type. He had had one sister, two years older than himself, who had died in 1931. Her death was not registered at Somerset House.

Harris stopped short in his reading. "Her death not registered . . ." Could she have died abroad, then? This was worth looking into. Whatever the story, it might have nothing to do with this case—but on the other hand there was the fact of the burnt photograph.

Copley, Berkshire, presents no surprises as a town. It has its Georgian streets and its Victorian ones, the whole blended pleasantly together by the uniform red brick. The streets are rather too narrow and mostly, except in the centre of the town, overhung with trees.

Inspector Harris found the local police amenable and helpful. Half an hour after arriving in the town his car drew up before the house of Forbes's aunt and sole surviving close relation, Miss Isabella Forbes.

Miss Forbes's dark drawing-room was cluttered with bric-à-brac, and Miss Forbes herself was festooned with heavy Victorian jewellery. Her voice was very quiet, and the atmosphere in the room hushed and oppressive.

After expressing his sympathy and answering Miss Forbes's questions about her nephew's death, Harris was able to get down to business. "You'll understand, I'm sure, Miss Forbes," he began, "that I need to get as clear

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a picture as possible of your nephew's life. I'd like you to give me a few facts about his sister, the one who died in 1931."

"His only sister," she said stiffly. "But surely she can have no bearing on his death?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Forbes," he replied soothingly, "but I can't afford to overlook anything. I know this must be painful for you. I'll try to be as brief as possible."

She inclined her head.

"Could you tell me the circumstances of your niece's death?"

The old lady fumbled with one of the gold chains looped across her narrow bosom. "I can't help you," she murmured.

"Miss Forbes," Harris protested, "I need hardly remind you that this is a murder inquiry——"

"You don't understand," she replied. "It's not that I *won't* but that I *can't* help you." In her evident distress she looked directly at Harris for the first time. Her eyes gleamed wetly. Looking away again, she went on: "I just don't know how my niece died. They all suddenly went to London. She didn't come back. I was fond of Lucy. I—I thought it unfair of them not to let me know. I never felt the same towards my brother and his wife afterwards. That's why I can't tell you much about the family or James."

"I see. Do you know, at least, if your niece died abroad?"

Miss Forbes compressed her thin lips. "Why should she have?" she said sharply. "My brother and his wife were in England all that year, and so was my niece, to the best of my knowledge."

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"Can you perhaps give me the name of your brother's doctor, if he is still alive?"

"Certainly. Dr. William Gray. He lives in Court Street. Number three. Dr. Gray has been the family doctor since the war. The First War, I mean."

"Thank you," Harris said. "Got that address, Leeds?" Leeds nodded.

"One other question, Miss Forbes. Had your niece any close friends that you remember? That still live in Copley, perhaps?"

"Yes, there is one. She's a Mrs. Edwards now. She married a solicitor. She and Lucy were at school together."

Thanking Miss Forbes for sparing them her time, Harris and Leeds left the gloomy house. It was a relief to find themselves out in the late afternoon sunshine again.

Their call on Dr. Gray was hardly more rewarding. The doctor, a cadaverous-looking old man, received them in a cold, barn-like surgery. Like Miss Forbes, he seemed taken aback at being questioned about Lucy.

She had been his patient, yes, ever since she was a child. A charming girl, pretty too; he remembered her well. Her health was always good. No, he hadn't attended her when she died. A tragedy, that. She was killed in London, in an accident apparently, though no one in Copley ever knew the facts. There had been a private funeral service, just the parents and the boy, in London. The family never spoke of her: they had naturally taken her death hard, and no one ever presumed to discuss it with them. A very close family.

Hazarding a guess at random, Harris asked: "Would you call them puritanical?"

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"Puritanical?" The doctor looked annoyed. "I don't quite take your meaning."

"Well," the Inspector persisted, "would you describe them as broad-minded?"

"I see what you're driving at, sir. Well, they weren't broad-minded in the sense in which you use the word. My generation didn't have the present-day obsession with sex, thank God."

"Has it ever occurred to you, Dr. Gray, considering the secrecy which surrounded Lucy Forbes's death, that the girl might have been in trouble? Suppose, for instance, that she had been pregnant."

Angrily the doctor banged his hand on the table. "It has never occurred to me, sir, and I don't believe it. Surely the police have something better to do with their time than to sully a fine girl's memory?"

"That is not the object of my investigation, Dr. Gray," Harris replied hastily. "Is there anyone else, do you know, who might give me information about Lucy Forbes's death?"

"I can't think of anyone," the doctor replied coldly.

"I see. Thank you for sparing us your time. Good afternoon, Doctor."

When Harris rang the bell of the Edwards's house, Stella Edwards herself came to the door. A little girl of about eight clutched her skirt and peered round curiously at the stranger. He explained who he was and why he had called.

"Please come in, Inspector," Mrs. Edwards said, in a slightly harassed voice. "Susan, run along upstairs and let

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Mrs. White help you with your bath." The little girl obeyed, with a shy smile for Harris.

Her mother led him into an untidy sitting-room. The flowered chair-covers and the cheap furniture were shabby, and toys were littered over the carpet. As Harris sat down, the springs of the arm-chair gave under him alarmingly.

"The person I'm really inquiring about is Miss Lucy Forbes. Her aunt said you might be able to help me."

"Lucy Forbes!" Mr. Edwards looked thoughtful, then wary. "After all these years?"

"You were her closest friend, I understand."

"Yes, I suppose I was," she said slowly. "She didn't have many friends in Copley."

"How did she get on with her family?"

"Well enough, I think. I really don't remember."

"When did you last see her, Mrs. Edwards?"

"What an extraordinary question, after all this time! Let me see. It was not long before—before she died. About a week before, I believe."

"How *did* she die?"

Mrs. Edwards looked confused. "Haven't they told you she was killed in an accident in London?"

"But I'm asking you, Mrs. Edwards."

The woman got up from her chair and crossed the room to pick up a newspaper. She began to fold it, her back turned to Harris. "What's all this about, Inspector?"

"Don't keep anything back," he said gently. "What good can you hope to do Lucy Forbes? As I told you, I'm investigating her brother's death." His manner was friendly, almost confidential. "For various reasons I have to sort out his family. I'll tell you this much. So far as I

can make out, my sympathies will all be with Miss Forbes."

She turned. A look of decision came over her face. "All right, Inspector. I'll tell you what I know. As you say, it can't hurt her. Well, she had an affair with a boy in London. I don't know who it was—she had quite a few friends up there—and she wouldn't tell me. But I think he was called Henry. Then one night she came to my house—my parents' house, it was before I was married—and I thought she must be ill, she was trembling so violently. She told me she thought she was going to have a baby. She was much too frightened to tell her parents. I tried to calm her, but she was still in a terrible state when she left. I can see her now in her black coat walking away down the street. Well, she told her parents. I saw her again next day, and she said she had been tempted to kill herself in the night, they were so cruel.

"I didn't see her for a few days after that: she seemed to be avoiding me. Then she came in one evening and told me that her parents wanted her to have the child taken away. She cried and cried. She seemed to want the baby very much.

"I never saw her again. They took her to London that week-end and came back without her. Then they gave out the story of the accident."

She concluded bitterly: "I suppose they had their way and she died."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Edwards. It must have been a terrible shock for you. I'm sorry to have to remind you of it."

"Yes, it was a shock. After all, I was only twenty."

"Do you happen to know which doctor was consulted about her pregnancy?"

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"Dr. Gray, her family doctor." She paused. "He still practises here."

"I know."

"You won't mention my name?" she said anxiously. "This is a small town and my husband——"

"Of course not," he assured her. "You don't happen to remember the names of any of Lucy Forbes's London friends? Ogilvie, Baker, Marinney?"

She shook her head. "No, I'm afraid not. I never went to London. That side of Lucy's life was a different world. We lived very quietly here."

Dr. Gray, the local police told them, was a widower with married children in London. He had a housekeeper and a nurse, both of whom lived out.

"Right," said Harris with sudden animation. "We'd better stay the night, Leeds. Ring your missus, and get a couple of rooms." He looked at his watch. "Would there be a stationer open at this hour?"

"Depends what you want," the Superintendent told him. "There's a newsagent just across the road, they keep a few odd things."

"Thanks. I expect that'll do."

Without offering any explanation, he darted across to the little shop and came out a few minutes later, looking pleased. He had a small bag in his hand.

As soon as he and Leeds had checked in at a hotel, he went up to his room. "See you downstairs in ten minutes," he said at the door. "We'd better get a meal."

Sitting at the round, lace-covered table, he opened his paper bag, taking out a small, fat black book. It was the

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standard type of indexed address book. He considered it carefully, and nodded. Then he began to rub it over the surface of the table, until it looked slightly worn and grubby. He slipped it into the inside pocket of his jacket. Whistling, he straightened his tie, and washed his hands in the basin by the door. Then he went downstairs to join Leeds for dinner.

At half past nine Harris left the hotel by himself and walked through the quiet streets to the doctor's house. There was only one light on in the house, and that at an upstairs window. Satisfied, Harris walked up the path to the front door and rang the bell.

After a long time Dr. Gray opened the door. He looked none too pleased when he saw who his caller was.

"So sorry to trouble you again, Doctor. Especially at this hour. But I have to leave for London shortly. I'm afraid when I saw you this afternoon I forgot one essential matter."

Reluctantly the doctor let him in and shut the door. He led the way to the little office where his nurse had received Harris earlier. Harris looked round the sparsely furnished room, missing nothing. "I'll have to trouble you, Doctor, for Mr. Forbes's medical history. We have to check certain facts against the cause of death."

"Mr. Forbes had a slight heart condition. But merely a cardiac neurosis: it couldn't have killed him in any circumstances." He added dryly, "I understood he had been stabbed?"

Ignoring his question, Harris said: "Might I ask to see your file on him?"

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Clearly put out, the doctor muttered: "Well, I suppose if it's necessary——" and unlocked the door of his surgery. Snapping on the light, he said, "Please wait here," and half-shut the door behind him.

As soon as he was alone, Harris crossed swiftly to the desk. On the shelf behind it lay a black address book, just where he had noticed it that afternoon. In a moment he had pocketed it, substituting the one he had bought which was almost identical.

When the doctor returned a minute later, Harris was again standing by the door. Glancing briefly through the case history, he handed it back and thanked the doctor.

As they left the room together, Harris suddenly stopped. "I'm sorry to be a nuisance, Dr. Gray, but I wonder if I might use your lavatory?"

With a clicking sound of annoyance, the doctor pointed the way to a door down the passage.

As soon as he had bolted the lavatory door behind him, the Inspector took out the address book and started to turn through the pages feverishly. He copied out a number of addresses. There were not a great many London ones, and some of them were clearly not what he was looking for. The whole business took him not more than five minutes.

He emerged to find the doctor waiting impatiently by the front door. "Oh, my gloves," said Harris. "Must have left them in here." Quickly he darted into the office, and before Dr. Gray could come shuffling down the passage had returned the address book and pocketed his own again.

When they said good night at the door, the old man looked amused. There was no doubt at all of what he thought of the Police.

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Next morning Harris put two men on to checking up on all the addresses he had culled from Dr. Gray's book. At first the results were disappointing. The London practitioners, among whom Harris hoped to find a shady one, all turned out to be respectable, at least on the surface.

Then one of the detectives turned up a nursing-home that sounded interesting. Harris rang the place immediately, found the Matron in, and drove round to see her. In the meantime he told Leeds to find out as much as he could about the past lives of everyone at Ranelagh Gardens.

Matron turned out to be a less forbidding type than most of the hospital matrons he had dealt with in the past. Plump-cheeked and plain, she was quite forthcoming. Yes, she knew Dr. Gray and he had sent her patients from time to time. She had founded the nursing-home herself thirty years ago.

Her records were complete, of course. She brought out a thickly-bound register. In 1932 she had had one patient from Dr. Gray. A young girl; she remembered her well. A nice little thing. Obviously unmarried, and going to have a baby. The girl gave the name of Allen: Lucy Allen.

"And what about the baby?" the Inspector asked.

"Everything went off well. She had it almost exactly on the day we expected it. She left us three weeks later."

"The child was adopted?"

Matron looked surprised. "Oh, no. She doted on it. I don't believe she would have parted with it for anything."

"I see." Harris sighed heavily. "Did you ever hear from her afterwards?"

"Not a word. It was only to be expected, though, poor dear. She wanted to burn her bridges, I dare say. After

the baby was born, I remember, she became quite friendly and talkative. She never mentioned her past or her family, only her plans for the future." Matron shook her head sadly. "I don't know. Poor girl."

"Her plans for the future? Can you remember what she said?"

The woman pondered. "It's been so long," she said apologetically. "We've had thousands of patients since then."

"I know. But any small details you could recall might help us."

"I remember Dr. Gray himself asked me about her once. He wanted to know if I'd had any news of her. I had to tell him No, and he was disappointed." She frowned. "Wait. I do remember something. It's pretty general, I'm afraid. She told me, before she left, that she had written in answer to an advertisement and taken a room in Bayswater, and that she hoped to get a job in a department store. She'd run through all her money by then."

"Thank you, Matron." The Inspector stood up. "I think you have helped us. By the way, what was her baby?"

"A fine boy. She called him Michael."

Bayswater and a department store. The chances were that the store was Beauforts.

The staff record of Beauforts for 1932 had the name of a Mrs. Lucy Allen, who worked in the handkerchief department for six months. Her address had been No. 30 Northbourne Terrace.

The detective who called at Northbourne Terrace was

told that the house had been sold ten years before. From the agent he learned the name and address of the previous owner, a Mr. Lloyd, who now owned a lodging-house in Hampstead.

But when the detective reached Hampstead, he found that Mr. Lloyd was out. The woman who opened the door, one of his tenants, did not know when he would be back.

Seventeen

AFTER she had heard the news of Forbes's death, Sarah did not leave her bedroom all day. Inspector Harris interviewed her there in her dressing-gown, sitting huddled miserably in the arm-chair by the fire: the curtains were still drawn, and only the bedside lamp was burning. After he had gone she crawled back to bed and lay there for most of the day, awake and tormented by her thoughts. Barton brought her meals, but she ate nothing; she told him, in answer to his repeated inquiries, that she did not want to see anyone. There was no longer anyone she could trust. Once or twice she heard footsteps along the passage stop outside her door, but there was no knock, and after a few minutes they went away again. At last, somewhere about midnight, she fell into an exhausted sleep.

When Barton brought her some breakfast the next morning she asked him to draw the curtains. It was a fine day. Rousing herself, she discovered that she was hungry. But the letter she found on the tray with the breakfast things took away her appetite.

It was written on cheap blue notepaper in a childish hand that she recognized. Michael wanted her to meet him that afternoon: he would be in a certain café near Ladbroke Grove at four.

In a ferment of indecision Sarah got out of bed, leaving the food untouched. Her first instinct to destroy the letter

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and forget all about it passed quickly: it was too late to turn back in her relationship with this boy. But she would obviously be followed if she left the house, and she was determined at all costs to keep Michael away from the police.

Oppressed by her bedroom, she dressed at once and went downstairs. The house was oddly silent: only the faint sounds of the Bartons' wireless floated up from the basement. No fire had been lit in the drawing-room, and it had a chilly, un-lived-in air. Shivering, she went across to the fireplace and drew forward the electric fire, plugged it in and switched it on.

Standing in front of the fire, she laid one arm along the mantelpiece and rested her head against it. In the other hand she held Michael's letter. She did not know how long she remained like that, lost in her painful thoughts, but suddenly she was aware that there was someone else in the room.

"Is there anything I can do to help, Mrs. Ogilvie?" Baker's voice asked.

Guiltily she swung round, dropping the pathetic little note as she did so. He stepped forward swiftly to retrieve it for her and handed it back. "Bad news?"

Dully she answered: "I don't know what to do."

"Would you like to tell me about it? Don't think me presumptuous, but perhaps I can advise you."

He spoke sympathetically, and she looked up to see him standing in front of her, his boyish face serious and eager. Impetuously she made up her mind. "I shouldn't really. I promised I wouldn't tell anyone."

He smiled encouragingly. "I can keep a secret. You can trust me."

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In a few minutes she was telling him the whole story, much as she had told it to Marinney a few days before.

Baker listened intently. When she had finished he asked: "Do you know anything about his mother?" just as Marinney had done.

She shook her head. "I think she must be dead. He never speaks of her. But I had a mad sort of idea that she was Forbes's sister. Then I discovered that Lucy Forbes had died as a girl—before Michael was born."

"Did Marinney tell you that?"

"No. Forbes himself did. Why do you ask?"

"I just wondered. However, that's neither here nor there. The point is, are you going to meet this boy to-day?"

"I don't see how I can. I'm sure to be followed. And yet I feel I shouldn't let him down. You probably think I'm crazy—obsessed like this with Henry's child."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Not at all. We all have our obsessions. Do you want me to go instead?"

"You? *Would* you?"

"Of course."

Her face brightened, then fell again as she said: "Oh, but that's no good either. They'd follow you, too. They must be following all of us now."

"I expect so. But I can give them the slip. I was trained for this sort of thing—during the war." He laughed. "A flatfoot's no match for me."

"Are you sure?" she said doubtfully. "The one thing I want to avoid is the police getting on to him. I have an idea he's mixed up with some pretty shady people."

"Of course I'm sure. You don't have to worry. Give me the letter." He held out his hand. "No, wait, you'd

better write something on it—so that he'll trust me." He took a pen from his inside pocket. "Here you are—put something or other to reassure him."

As she bent over the sheet of paper he looked at her reflectively. "You don't look too good, Sarah," he said gently, using her Christian name for the first time. "I wouldn't be surprised if you've not been eating. Why don't you go along and have a square meal?"

She smiled bleakly. "Yes, I think perhaps now I will."

The fish-and-chip shop was in a turning off Ladbroke Grove. In the window was a sign *FRYING TODAY* flanked by two naked light bulbs, unlit. The place was dim. It was half empty when Baker went in.

Looking round the room, he saw no one who answered Sarah's description of Michael. So he took a seat on the wooden bench at a bare, scrubbed table in the corner. Unfolding his evening paper, he only pretended to read.

The sharp-faced proprietress came up and asked him what he wanted. He ordered cod fillet and chips. She returned to the kitchen, from which there emanated a heavy, nauseating odour of frying.

No one else had come in. He glanced at his watch. It was four ten. He wetted his lips with his tongue and took up his paper again.

A few minutes later the door was opened, and a young man came in. His face was grubby, and he wore a leather jacket over a high-necked sweater. He looked round the room and gave a low whistle of disappointment.

Then he saw Baker staring at him, and returned the

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stare. Uncertainly he crossed the room and sat down on the bench opposite.

"Are you Michael?" Baker asked.

"Who are you?" the boy countered. In answer Baker pushed the sheet of blue paper across the table. "She couldn't come. She sent me instead."

Glancing first at the paper and then suspiciously at Baker, he muttered: "Oh, hell."

Taking out a packet of cigarettes, Baker offered one to the boy, who took it and put it in his pocket. "Have them all, I don't want them."

The packet went the way of the first cigarette.

Encouraged, Michael asked: "Well, what can I do for you?"

"You asked her to meet you. What did you want?"

"I'm not telling *you*. How do I know who you are? She never told me about you before."

"Never mind. I know all about you."

"Trust women to blab," he grumbled.

Casually Baker said: "I used to know your mother."

The boy stared at him, his mouth slightly open to reveal his badly-kept teeth.

"Don't look so surprised." Baker studied his face detachedly. "You're not very like her. Is she still beautiful?"

"Beautiful? Mum?" He rocked with laughter. "That's rich." Some people at a nearby table turned round to stare, and he stopped laughing.

Baker's eyes were narrowed. "That's not very funny. I'd like to see your mother again. Can you take me to see her?"

"Don't try to be too smart, mister. No one's finding out where I live."

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"If you don't trust me, go and ask your mother. The name's Baker. She'll remember me."

"So what? How do I know you're not a cop?"

"Do I look like one?"

"No," he admitted reluctantly.

"Go home and ask her. You live near here."

"You're only guessing."

Baker took out his wallet and opened it to show a wad of notes, before putting it back in an inner pocket. "All I want is to see your mother."

"Would that be for me—what you just showed me?"

"It would."

The boy's nails picked at the table-top restlessly. "I'll think it over."

"Don't be a fool. If I were a cop, I'd turn you in now, wouldn't I? I'm not interested in your activities."

Michael studied him. "You're up to something, mister."

"I see now who you're like."

"Who?"

"Your father."

The boy's face blazed with anger. "Don't you dare say that!"

"All right. Keep your hair on. I won't say it. Now how about doing what I want. Go and ask your mother about me, and meet me here again."

"Not right away. I want time to think it over. Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, then. Same time."

"Same wallet." The boy pointed, grinning.

"That's understood."

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When the proprietress brought the plate of greasy fish and chips she found her customer had gone. "Some people!" she muttered angrily, as she stumped back to the kitchen.

Eighteen

HARRIS stooped down to peer at the row of bells. Only one of them had a card beneath it. The card was torn and dirty. In barely legible letters it said: "ALLEN—Top Floor. Four rings." The house door was open.

He pressed the bell four times and then went into the dingy hall. Two steps at a time he ascended the stairs, covered in a well-worn brown drugget. On the first and second landings there was the usual all-pervading smell of cabbage. The last flight of stairs was uncarpeted and much narrower and darker: Harris stumbled once before reaching the top.

The paint was flaking off the door. He tapped the dull brass of the pixie knocker and waited. After a long time he heard slow footsteps across the room inside. Then the door was half opened. "What do you want?" a woman's tired voice asked.

At first he didn't see her standing in the doorway. The room was even darker than the staircase, and his eyes took time to get accustomed to the gloom. Then he made out the figure of a small, thin woman, wearing what looked to be a dressing-gown.

"Are you Mrs. Allen?"

"I suppose so. Well?"

"I'm Detective-Inspector Harris of Scotland Yard. I'd like to ask you a few questions. May I come in, please?"

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Warily she closed the door a little. "What's it about?" She slurred her words in a curious way.

"I'll tell you when we get inside."

She hesitated, then reluctantly opened the door wider. "All right. Come in." She flicked a switch by the door, and a dim overhead light came on. Following her in and shutting the door behind him, Harris saw that the curtains were drawn, which accounted for the gloom. The room was sparsely and drably furnished. The bed was unmade. In a recess stood an antiquated gas-cooker and a sink, piled with crockery; an arch led to an alcove in which there was a second bed, strewn with film magazines and gramophone records. They both remained standing.

"Well?" she asked.

"Have you read the papers today, Mrs. Allen?" Harris asked.

"I never read them. Why should I bother? I'm not interested."

"In that case you won't know that your brother is dead?"

"You're making a mistake," she said in a flat voice. "I haven't got a brother."

"You had one until yesterday."

"I don't understand what you're talking about. I don't have any family—except my son." She gestured towards the alcove.

"What was your maiden name, Mrs. Allen?"

"Smith."

"You're not acting in your own best interests, you know, Mrs. Allen," Harris said patiently. "When you decide to give up this masquerade you'll be coming in for a good deal of money."

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She shuffled across the room and sat down on the bed.
“Money doesn’t interest me.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s too late. Look at me.”

He could hardly see her in the dim light. But the shadows emphasized the lines and hollows of her face; and her figure was gaunt. She looked at least fifty-five.

“I gave up caring years ago,” she said. “Anyway, as I’ve told you already, you’re making a mistake. You’ve found the wrong person.”

“You haven’t changed so much. You still look like Lucy Forbes.”

She recoiled as she spoke the name. “How do you know what Lucy Forbes looked like?” she asked angrily. “What do you want with me?”

“A man named Henry Ogilvie was murdered a few days ago. Does that mean anything to you?”

She stared at him and then burst into shrill laughter. “At last! After all these years. So he met his match at last!” Abruptly she stopped laughing. “I’m sorry. I’m not quite as heartless as I sound. It came as rather a shock—your just telling me like that. As I said, I don’t read the papers.”

“In that case you won’t know that your brother was staying in Ogilvie’s house—here in London. Your brother James. Yesterday he was found dead—stabbed through the heart. Murdered.”

“James murdered!” she said wonderingly, after a few seconds. “Poor boy, I can’t even remember what he looked like.”

“But *he* remembered what *you* looked like. After his death we found a photograph of you in his room.”

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"I don't believe it."

"Why not? Is it so odd for a brother to have a photo of the sister he believed dead?"

"He knew I wasn't dead. Anyway, he would never have a photograph of me. He didn't believe in half-measures, any more than my parents did. They said they never wanted to see me again, and they meant it. They'd have torn up every photo of me in the house. Wiped me out."

"Perhaps you didn't really know your brother. After twenty-five years he still had the picture we found."

"Twenty-five years," she repeated. "You seem to know everything."

"I wish I did."

For some reason she looked at the cheap alarm-clock on the table near her. "I can't offer you a cup of tea," she said. "I'm not working just now. And my son's out. He'll bring me something home, I expect." She looked up at his tall figure still standing in the middle of the room. "Well, you might as well sit down. You make me feel embarrassed, just standing there."

He sat down on a rickety chair behind him.

"You say I'll be coming into some money. Hadn't he made a will leaving it to someone else?"

"Surprisingly enough, your brother died intestate. Who knows, he may have had a guilty conscience?"

"Not likely. Even as a boy, James was self-righteous. Was it just the money you came to see me about?"

"Not really. I hoped you might be able to help me."

"How?"

"I'm trying to find out who murdered your brother and Ogilvie."

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"Don't ask me," she said disinterestedly. "I don't know anything about it. I don't even know where Henry lived."

"I'm not accusing you, Mrs. Allen. But if I mention some names, will you tell me if any of them mean anything to you?"

She hesitated. "All right."

"Barton?" Harris began. "Have you ever known anyone called Barton?"

"No. I don't think so."

"How about Stokes?"

She thought for a moment. "I used to know a woman called Miss Stokes. A landlady."

"Marinney?" Harris spoke the name slowly, watching its effect on her.

"Yes, of course," she said readily. "He was at school with James and Henry. I knew him slightly."

"Only slightly?"

"Yes. He was the quiet sort who was much too afraid of girls to talk to them more than he had to."

"How did he and your brother get on?"

"They were school friends. Not close—just thrown together in the way one was at school." She had shifted her position so that what light there was now fell directly on her face. He could see that she had once been beautiful. "It's odd how I remember after all these years. I forget things that happened last year—last week, even—but I can still remember my girlhood quite clearly. Memory's a funny thing, isn't it?"

"There's one more name," Harris said. "Baker."

He thought for a moment that she had not heard him. Then he saw that her face had gone rigid. She fumbled in

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the pocket of her stained dressing-gown. Taking out a crumpled handkerchief, she passed it over her forehead. "Tom Baker?" she said at last.

"Yes."

Putting the handkerchief away, she sat up straighter on the bed. She looked strange. "I wish you hadn't mentioned his name."

"Why?"

"I treated him badly. He was in love with me. And I loved him—before the other."

Nineteen

WHEN Baker returned, Sarah was waiting impatiently for him in the drawing-room. Shutting the door behind him, he crossed the room towards her. "I've seen him," he said.

"What did he want?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't say. But he wants you to come to his house."

"His house? How can I?" She sat down abruptly. "It's very odd: he's always been so secretive before."

"He was cagey enough with me, too. He wouldn't say anything, beyond that it was urgent and you must come and see him."

"Urgent," she repeated. "What can it be?"

"Perhaps he's in some sort of trouble."

"Did you think so?"

"As a matter of fact, I did. He was obviously nervous. He kept looking towards the door." He took out a packet of cigarettes and offered her one. She waved it away. Lighting his own, he said: "I quite liked the boy. For all his surliness, I think he's not a bad sort underneath. I can understand your taking to him and feeling responsible for him."

"Yes, I did feel responsible. I do, I mean." She stood up again. "Do you think I should try to see him? I don't know what to do. What do you think?"

He considered, inhaling deeply. "It's not my business, Sarah. But I think you ought to go."

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"Yes, but how can I? When I go out, I'm followed. There was a man behind me all the time I was out for a walk this morning."

"It can be arranged."

"How do you mean?"

"I'll explain in a minute. First I'd better tell you that he's living in a house in North Hammersmith. I don't suppose you know that part of London."

"No."

"It's complicated—difficult to find your way about, particularly after dark. Besides it's not a pleasant neighbourhood. So I thought I'd go with you this evening. That is unless you'd rather go alone."

"This evening?"

"Now, I mean. He wants you to come at once."

"Oh, I see." She blinked nervously. "Would you come with me? I'm putting you to so much trouble."

"Not at all. I'm interested."

"But how can I possibly get there without being followed?"

"Just do as I say."

From force of habit she sat down at her dressing-table, looked in the glass and powdered her face. Listlessly she ran a comb through her hair. Opening the cupboard, she took out a plain black coat and put it on. On the bedside table she had left her handbag, with the French novel she had been reading, still opened and face down. Taking the handbag, she walked round the bed to look out of the window.

Near the front steps there were still a few people. She

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stepped back quickly, though no one was looking up.

Letting herself out of the room, she locked the door behind her and put the key in her purse. After a quick glance over the banisters, she went down the steeper flight of stairs to the basement.

The kitchen door was shut. As quietly as possible she unlocked the back door and stepped into the garden. The rickety gate let her out into an alley-way that brought her to the street, only a few yards away from the people who waited outside her front-door. Hurrying to the corner, she hailed a cruising taxi. "Regent Street," she said, and got in.

The taxi drove down the Cromwell Road, turning up at Queen's Gate towards the park. She looked at her watch: it was five past six. "I think I'd better get out at Knightsbridge Station," she said to the driver, leaning forward to speak through the opening in the glass partition.

As they drove, she gazed out at the Park on their left, which looked sad with its patchy autumnal greenness.

At Knightsbridge she jumped out of the taxi, thrust two half-crowns at the driver, and ran down the stairs of the tube. She had the exact fare, three pennies, ready for the ticket machine. Ignoring the ticket collector, she dashed down the escalator. Near the bottom she looked round and saw that no one else was on the stairs.

At the platform the doors of an east-bound train were just closing. She managed to squeeze her way in, but was satisfied that no one could have got in after her.

At Hyde Park Corner she got out of the train, hurried upstairs, took the first taxi waiting in the rank, and this time said "Marble Arch".

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Without hurrying, she got out at Marble Arch and went downstairs again to the tube. She took a west-bound train.

When she emerged at Ladbroke Road, Sarah realized how tired she was. She walked slowly and heavily along the wide pavements towards the railway bridge.

Under its arch Baker was waiting. "Everything all right?" he asked her.

"Yes. I wasn't followed, I'm sure."

Baker looked away. "I hope I can remember the directions the boy gave me. It's back that way, first of all."

They walked westwards, in the opposite direction from Ladbroke Grove. Sarah, who didn't know the neighbourhood at all, supposed that they were going towards White City. She felt increasingly helpless and lost.

She was too weary to keep track of the direction or the streets. Sunk in her own thoughts, she was glad of Baker's silence. She started when he spoke at last to point out a certain house that had once been a grand one.

He seemed preoccupied now. From time to time, he glanced at Sarah covertly, as if to reassure himself of something or other.

Suddenly intimidated by the silence, Sarah asked him if he had been here before.

"I'm not sure. I used to have a passion for exploring London, even parts of it like this."

"Have we far to go? I'm rather tired."

"Not very far." He began to walk more quickly.

Sarah, vaguely uneasy, found herself talking uncontrollably. "It's like a child's game. All the past week has been like that. I've felt as though I were running away from something and being pursued all the time. As though

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I were the hare in a game of hare-and-hounds. It's a feeling that I've always hated. I used to have nightmares about it as a child. In the end I could do only one thing: throw myself into the arms of the hunters and be captured. It's nearly dark. How depressing it is, the days drawing in. There aren't many people about now. It's their dinner time, high tea, I suppose."

Baker still said nothing. Now it was she who kept glancing at him.

They seemed to have walked miles. She shivered, though she wasn't cold. But the evening wind was a biting one. Now they passed no one in the streets. Lights appeared in windows, making the narrow streets seem darker and more desolate by contrast. The street-lamps seemed to give only a feeble glare.

At last they found themselves in a cul-de-sac, where an alley-like turning brought them to half an acre of rubble. This was bomb-damage not yet cleared and fenced round by a low, inadequate structure of planks. "I'm sorry," Baker said suddenly, in a harsh voice. "We seem to be lost.. I'm not much of a guide, am I?" He touched her arm solicitously. "You look tired. Let's rest here a bit."

They leant their elbows on the low, horizontal plank and looked out over the rubble. In some places walls, complete with interior doors and mantelpieces and flying bits of staircase leading into nothingness, still showed remains of paint and paper that was blackened, torn and streaked by the weather. Elsewhere the gaps had been blasted down to the buildings' foundations.

The moonlight flickered, departed and came like a huge yellow cat, making movement and shadow in the ruins. Sarah bent her head to stare down the shaft just above

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which they stood. The fence trembled beneath the weight of their arms. In the absence of the moon, the drop appeared almost bottomless. She shuddered.

"Did Henry never talk to you about me?" he asked. His voice sounded far away.

"He mentioned you once or twice, that was all."

"I see. I thought you might have known the whole story."

"What story?"

He did not answer, and she could no longer see his face clearly. The half-light gave it a weird look. The rush of fear, and of realization, that she felt was almost paralysing.

Slowly she began to edge away from him.

Then his arm reached out and he seized her wrist, drawing her towards him.

As she opened her mouth to scream, he put his hand over it. "I've a knife," he said. "So keep quiet."

Still grasping her wrist, he took his other hand away from her mouth. Panting, almost sobbing, she tried to get her breath. "What do you want with me?" she gasped.

"I want to tell you the truth." He spoke in a voice as hoarse as her own.

Suddenly the moon went behind a screen of clouds, and the shells of the buildings, black, only outlines of broken towers in the darkness, appeared to move farther away. Below them the open shaft, its jagged edges hidden, looked a soft and inviting place. Sarah felt a touch on her arm and Baker's warm breath on her cheek.

"I'm sorry for you, but you know too much," he said. "It's a pity for you that you ever saw that boy."

She struggled, and he dragged her towards the edge of the shaft. She seized the horizontal plank and held fast to

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it. He relaxed his grip a little. "Stop struggling and you'll live a little longer."

"You killed them—Henry and Forbes," she gasped.

"Yes, I killed them. I'm not sorry. They both deserved to die. Shall I tell you?" His eyes glittered.

She nodded, unable to speak, feeling her strength leaving her. Let him talk. It would be a delay.

"There's so much to tell you," Baker whispered, holding her in what was almost an embrace. "I have to tell it; I can't keep it to myself any longer. I've been waiting for twenty-five years to be revenged. Not for myself!" he half-shouted, shaking her in his frenzy.

Hearing the loud echo of his voice, he waited. But no one else had heard. The houses were too far away across the rubble.

He went on, in a quiet voice again. "For Lucy, not for myself. You see, you were right—it was Lucy. I adored her, and she said she loved me. We were planning to elope. Then Ogilvie found out. It was only to spite me, not because he wanted her, that he made love to her. God; he knew all the tricks. When he was sixteen he used to tell stories about the girls in the village and the London whores he had slept with. He even offered to give a demonstration—a lesson, he called it—with one of the maids at the school. I couldn't listen to him. I was sick afterwards. Then I met Lucy, and we fell in love. He found out. He couldn't bear for someone else to have anything he hadn't got. So he seduced her, and she never looked at me again. He made her pregnant and then swore to her people that he'd never touched her. He tried to blame it on me. But she wouldn't have that—not out of sympathy for me, but because it was him she hoped to

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marry. Then her parents took her away, just left her in London on her own, a young girl like that who'd always been protected. Her own brother, Forbes, said he hoped she'd die. That snivelling hypocrite, who used to listen to Ogilvie's stories with his tongue hanging out.

"They said she was dead, but I didn't believe it. I tried to find her. I never said anything to anyone. But I didn't forget. I never bothered with women after that. It wasn't difficult—I was numbed, you see. For twenty-five years. Till Ogilvie invited me to stay. Old chums' reunion! He asked for it. I'd made up my mind to kill him. I didn't know how—but I'd learnt to be an opportunist in the war. That first night I saw my chance: I'd overheard them talking about the sleeping stuff, and while Forbes was out of the room I slipped down. It was all too easy—the milk was on the table by the door.

"I didn't mean to kill Forbes as well, but he guessed too much. He guessed that I fixed my alibi. Then he saw me going to the drawing-room to make sure Ogilvie had drunk the milk. Curse that gramophone. And then he dared to search my room and steal Lucy's picture. I didn't want to spare him after that. And now it's your turn. I had nothing against you, but you know too much. Don't blame me." Wild-eyed, he tried to loosen her hold on the plank. "Don't blame me, Sarah!"

The moon had emerged again from behind the clouds, and the sudden light spilling over them changed her mood. Sarah felt her grip tighten. "Now you know the story," he shouted, careless of the noise, "and I might as well finish what I started."

They struggled again, Sarah clutching the narrow plank; Baker tearing at her hands, trying to loosen her

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hold. And then, with a crashing sound, the plank split; there was no strength in it any longer; and Sarah, with nothing to hold to, was half-dragged, half-driven to the edge of the shaft.

Desperately she held on to Baker now, as the only way to save herself from being thrown down. But he was bending her fingers back, forcing her to let go.

In this last struggle, her handbag fell open behind his back. Something glinted in the moonlight. The metal paper-knife, the knife she had been using to cut the pages of her French book.

Tremblingly she got her fingers round the knife's handle. The coldness of the metal gave her strength. As she felt his muscles tense to hurl her over the edge, she raised her arm and drove the knife down, with all her force, into his back.

His scream shattered the silence; and they both tottered on the edge of the shaft.

Twenty

THE basement room was littered with clothes. Ada packed untidily, taking things out of drawers and cupboards and then dumping them on chairs or the bed. Her suitcases were still empty. But the room already had an abandoned look. The garish calendar and the pictures had been taken down from the walls, and furniture was pushed to one side. Kneeling on the floor, she worked steadily, accomplishing nothing.

She did not turn round when the door opened and Stokes came in. "So it's good-bye, Ada," he said.

Keeping her head averted, she did not answer, but went on with her work.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "I believe you're crying." He went across to her and put his hand on her shoulder. Roughly she shook it off.

"Go away," she mumbled, "I don't want to see you."

"Well, you won't have to after today. Let's part friends."

Getting to her feet, she brushed the dust from her skirt.

"Tell me where you're going," he said.

"I've a sister in Croydon. We're going to her. She's got a boy about Howard's age."

"I didn't know you had a family."

"There's a lot you don't know. Well, I shan't be staying long with my sister; she's not my type. It's only for the boy's sake I'm going there: he wants somewhere homely."

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"And what do you want?"

"I want to be on my own again. *He* took my best years and he's dead, but I'm not past having a good time."

"Certainly not." He spoke not with irony, but affection.

"I'll get a decent job. Hostess at a club, or something like that."

"I wish I could help you."

"I don't need help, thank you." She knelt down again and continued her packing. Her movements were stiff, like an old woman's. "Nice of you to come down and see me. I'll say good-bye now."

"No one can say that you haven't got guts," he said. "Whose idea was it, yours or Barton's, to separate?"

"Mine, of course. Anyway, he cares more for the house than for me. He's as pleased as punch to be staying on here."

"That's funny. I'd hate to stay. By the way, I'm going abroad. I've got a job in Paris."

"That's nice for you," she said tonelessly.

"Have you ever been to Paris?"

She turned round. "What do you think? *He* took me there once."

"Would you like to go again?"

"Some day, maybe."

"You could come and see me."

Automatically she put her hand to her hair, smoothing it back. "I might."

"We could have fun. I'll be well paid."

"It's funny," she said. "You've changed."

"Well, what do you say?"

"I'll think about it." She looked pleased, but she added

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huffily, "And now I'll thank you to let me finish my packing." Getting up, she gave him a little push towards the door.

Leaving her, Stokes went upstairs. Outside Marinney's room he stopped, hesitated, and finally knocked.

Inside was a similar scene to the one downstairs, only on a much smaller scale. Marinney seemed to have far more things than could possibly be crammed into his single suitcase. Looking pleased at the interruption, he cleared a space on the bed and sat down, motioning Stokes to the chair.

"I've just heard your news. Congratulations. I envy you Paris."

"I envy myself. I keep expecting it to fall through."

"It won't."

"I hope not."

"It's back to the same old grind for me," said Marinney, with a sigh. "No change for the wicked. Term starts tomorrow."

"I'm sorry. Still, you can't say your holiday hasn't been eventful."

"Yes, something to talk about on the long winter evenings in the Common Room."

"Well," said Stokes, getting up, "I mustn't keep you. I just wanted to wish you all the best. Perhaps we'll meet again some time."

"Perhaps. Well, good luck to you." They shook hands and parted.

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Having finished his packing, Marinney had one last good-bye to make. He had his hand on the door-knob when he hesitated. He didn't know what he would say to her. It was too difficult. Wouldn't it be simplest to leave her a note and not disturb her? She wouldn't care. Besides, the nurse had kept discouraging him from visiting the sick-room.

At that moment, in her room on the floor below, Sarah woke up and cried out in pain. The nurse came to her immediately, but Sarah motioned her away. It was tiring to be fussed and bullied. And the nurse was so impersonal; somehow her attentions were worse than nothing.

"Feeling better for your sleep?" the woman asked.

She nodded, untruthfully.

The nurse relaxed. "It'll be dinner time in an hour. That's something to look forward to."

Sarah turned her face to the wall. The thought of food made her feel sick. But the nurse was right: meals were all she had to look forward to as a break in the monotony of the day.

Stop being sorry for yourself, she told herself sharply and ineffectively. She looked down at her arms, thin and bony, lying on the plump eiderdown. Feeling suddenly oppressed by the weight of the bedclothes, she tried to sit up.

The nurse helped her, arranging the pillows, making a comfortable support for her back. "Well!" she said. "We are getting on, if we want to sit up."

Sarah tried to think of something to say, some way of starting an easy conversation. But talking was such an effort. Two days before, when Harris had come to see her, she had found it almost impossible to talk. She had hardly

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been able to give him a connected account of what had happened. In the end, he had pieced her story together by asking questions.

His manner had been almost apologetic. It appeared that she might have been spared all this, if only he had been a little quicker. He had told her of the stages by which he had found Lucy Forbes, and how the evidence—her and Marinney's statements that they were alone together in the drawing-room after dinner, Baker's war-time career—had suddenly snapped into place and pointed unmistakably to the murderer. When he had come round to the house that evening he had discovered that both she and Baker were out. Well, Baker, too, was dead now. He was already dead when they found her lying there, herself barely alive, on the edge of the shaft.

Sitting by the bed that day, the Inspector had been almost likeable. If he were anyone else, she would have thought him reluctant to leave at the end of their interview. Saying good-bye, he had looked at her oddly.

When he had told her that Marinney was seeing to all the arrangements in the house she had given a guilty little start. She had remembered how she had felt that she could never trust anyone again. "Tell him," she had said impulsively, "to do whatever he thinks best. But ask him to give Barton the chance to stay on."

Richard had seen to things. It was pleasant to depend on him. She wished he would come and see her. Suddenly she realized that she wished it very much.

The nurse was bustling about the room, doing nothing with an air of being busy. Over her shoulder she said: "You know, Mrs. Ogilvie, there's a gentleman been wanting to see you. I thought I'd tell you, but it's doctor's

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orders that you're not to have visitors. I thought I'd tell you, though." She sounded arch.

"Who is it, Nurse?" Sarah asked. For the first time her voice had some animation.

"Well, I shouldn't have told you really."

"Who is it, Nurse?" she repeated.

"Well, you see, he's outside now. He's going away and he wants to say good-bye. I don't suppose there's any harm in his coming in for a moment. Not a word to the doctor, mind."

"Do you mean he's been waiting outside all this time?"

"Well, really, Mrs. Ogilvie, I shouldn't have told you. It's Mr. Marinney."

"Please ask him to come in right away. Right away!"

Surprised by the strength of her patient's voice, the woman complied.

A moment later the door opened. Marinney came in, looking shy until he saw Sarah's outstretched hand.

